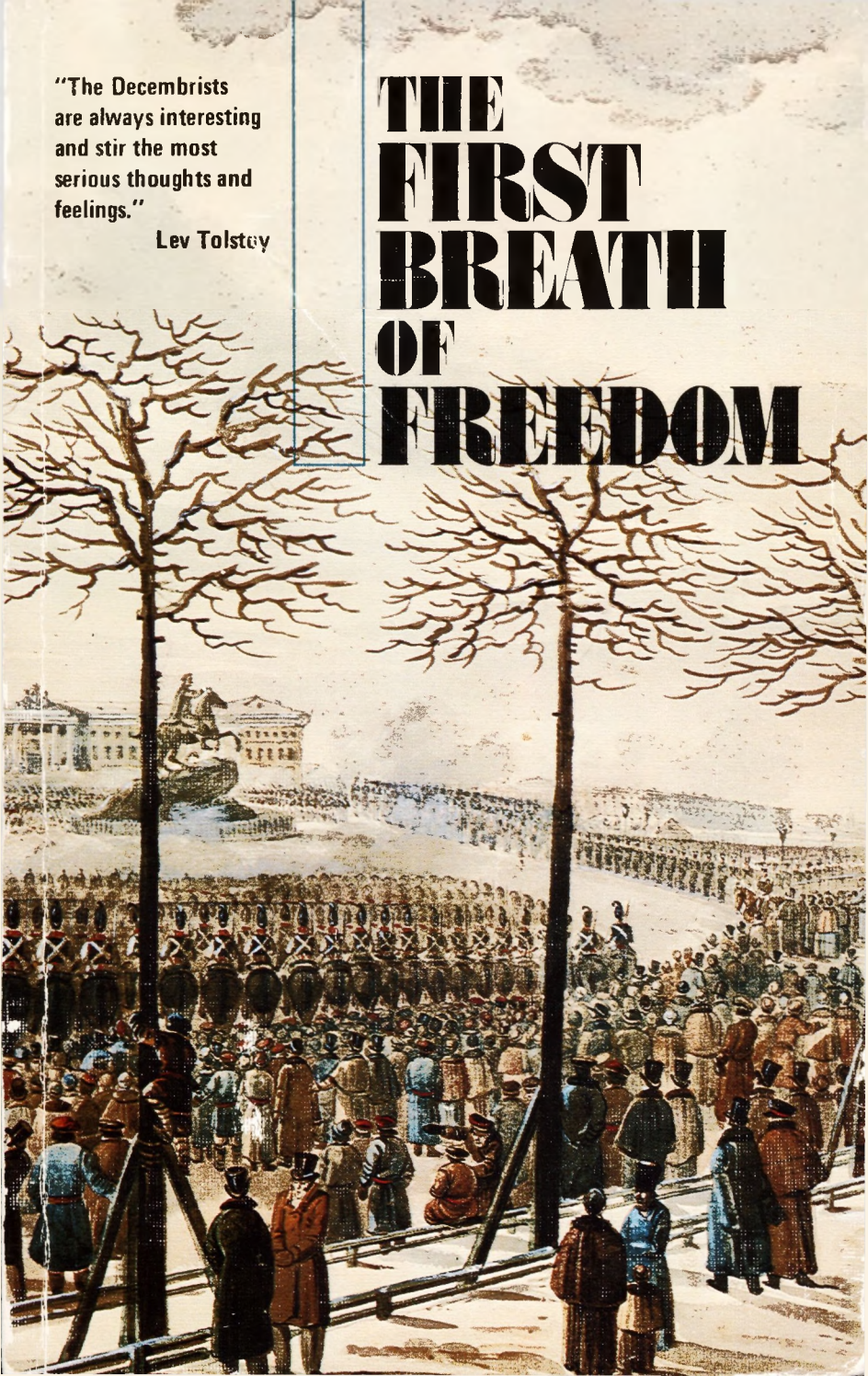
"The Decembrists are always interesting and stir the most serious thoughts and feelings."

Lev Tolstoy

THE FIRST BREATH OF FREEDOM



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THE FIRST BREATH OF FREEDOM

Progress
Publishers
Moscow

Translated from the Russian by *Synthia Carlile*
Designed by *Alexander Alexeyev*

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В первый русский вольный день

На английском языке

© Progress Publishers 1988

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

В 4702010100-201 84-88
014(01)-88

ISBN 5-01-000497-6

CONTENTS

A Few Words to the Reader 9

Mikhail Lunin. "A Look at the Secret Society in Russia (1816-1826)" 11

I. "Of Reflection the Noble Aspiration "

Historical Background 18

Pavel Pestel on the Formation of his Revolutionary Views. From his Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry 31

A Letter from Alexander Bestuzhev to Emperor Nicholas I from the SS Peter and Paul Fortress 36

From the Testimony of Pyotr Borisov to the Committee of Enquiry 41

A Letter Written by Pyotr Kakhovsky in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress to Emperor Nicholas I 42

Vladimir Rayevsky. From "Reflections on the Slavery of the Peasants" 45

Yakov Andreyevich on the Reasons Why He Joined the Secret Society. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry . . 48

Mikhail Fonvizin. "On the Causes of the Emergence of Secret Societies in Russia" 50

Nikolai Turgenev. From Diary Notes, 1816-1820 53

From the "Notes" of Ivan Yakushkin 58

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Union of Salvation and the Union of Welfare. From the "Notes" of Trubetskoy 65

From the Testimony of Pavel Pestel on the Union of Welfare 69

From the Statutes of the Union of Welfare (The Green Book) 70

From "A Brief Description of Various Secret Societies Whose Real or Fictitious Existence Was Discovered by the Committee of Enquiry". Early Decembrist Organisations 72

Vladimir Rayevsky. From "Reflections on the Soldier" 76

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. "The Semyonovsky Affair of 1820 79

From the Reminiscences of Ivan Yakushkin on the Moscow Congress of 1821 and the Dissolution of the Union of Welfare 86

From "A Brief Description of Various Secret Societies Whose Real or Fictitious Existence Was Discovered by the Committee of Enquiry". Societies Which Emerged after the Dissolution of the Union of Welfare 87

Nikolai Lorer. "Reminiscences of Pestel" 89

Pavel Pestel. "The Definition, Aim and Operation of the Russkaya Pravda. (Introduction to the Draft Constitution) 92

Nikita Muravyov About His Membership of the Secret Society. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry, 5 January 1826 94

From the Draft Constitution by Nikita Muravyov 95

Alexander Muravyov about His Brother, Nikita Muravyov. From His Recollections 97

Nikolai Bestuzhev about Kondratii Ryleyev. From His Recollections 99

Ivan Pushchin. "Notes on Pushkin" 103

From "A Brief Description of Various Secret Societies Whose Real or Fictitious Existence Was Discovered by the Committee of Enquiry". The Society of Associated Slavs 114

Pyotr Borisov on the Emergence of the Society of Associated Slavs. From His Testimony Before the Committee of Enquiry 115

Ivan Gorbachevsky. "On the Unification of the Society of Associated Slavs with the Southern Society" 118

The Speech Delivered by Bestuzhev-Riumin at a Meeting of the Members of the Society of Associated Slavs, 13 September 1825. From the Testimony of Bestuzhev-Riumin 124

Pavel Pestel on the Plans for an Armed Uprising and Coup d'Etat. From the Testimony of Pavel Pestel 125

Sergei Volkonsky on Government Surveillance of the Secret Society. 127

Yevgenii Obolensky. From "Reminiscences about Kondratii Ryleyev" 132

II. "The First Breath of Freedom"

The Insurrection 144

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Interregnum in November-December 1825. From the Reminiscences of Sergei Trubetskoy 150

Nikolai Bestuzhev on Preparations for the Insurrection on 14 December 1825. From His Reminiscences 156

Kondratii Ryleyev about Preparations for the Insurrection on 14 December 1825. From his Testimony before the Committee of Enquiry 162

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Plan of the Insurrection and Preparations for It. From the Testimony of S. Trubetskoy 165

Manifesto to the Russian People 169
Andrei Rozen on the Insurrection of 14 December 1825. From His Reminiscences. 170
From the Reminiscences of Vladimir Steingel 178
From the Reminiscences of Mikhail Bestuzhev 182
From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Bestuzhev 186
From the "Notes" of Nicholas I about 14 December 1825 . . . 188
Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. "The Insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment." From His Reminiscences 195
Ivan Gorbachevsky. "The Insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment." From His "Notes" 202

III. "In Our Destiny We Take Pride"

The Tsar Savagely Dealt with the Insurgents 214
Mikhail Fonvizin on the Enquiry into the Decembrists' Affair and Their Trial. From "A Review of the Manifestations of Political Life in Russia" 221
From the Reminiscences of Alexander Muravyov "My Journal" 224
Nikolai Lorer on His Interrogation in the Winter Palace. From His Recollections 230
From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin 233
Decree to the Supreme Criminal Court, 10 July 1826 249
From the Protocol of the Supreme Criminal Court of 11 July 1826 252
Instructions of Nicholas I on the Ceremonial Execution of the Sentence Against the Decembrists 253
The Report of the Governor-General of St Petersburg, P. Golenishchev-Kutuzov, to Nicholas I Dated 13 July 1826, on the Execution of the Death Sentence against P. Pestel, K. Ryleyev, S. Muravyov-Apostol, M. Bestuzhev-Riumin and P. Kakhovsky 254
From the Reminiscences of Yevgenii Obolensky 254
Alexander Herzen. From the Book *The Past and Reflections* . . 256
Alexander Muravyov. "On the Departure of the Condemned Decembrists into Penal Servitude." From His Reminiscences 257
From the "Notes" of Maria Volkonskaya 261
The Letters of Mikhail Lunin to His Sister, Yekaterina Uvarova (1838-1839) 273
From the Reminiscences of Pauline Annenkova 278
Nikolai Lorer about the Wives of the Decembrists. From His Reminiscences 283
The Death of Alexandra Muravyova. From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Lorer 287

Reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin about His Companions in Exile 289
Nikolai Belogolovy. From "Reminiscences of a Siberian about the Decembrists" 293
Pyotr Pershin (Karaksarsky) about Mikhail and Nikolai Bestuzhev in Exile in Siberia. From His Reminiscences 298
From the Reminiscences of Maria Frantseva 300
Nikolai Belogolovy on the Return of the Decembrists from Siberia. From "Reminiscences of a Siberian about the Decembrists" 306
Mikhail Lunin. "The Social Movement in Russia in the Present Reign" 308
Lev Tolstoy on the Return of the Decembrists 312
Alexander Herzen. From the Essay "On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia" 313
From the article by V. I. Lenin "In Memory of Herzen" 315

A FEW WORDS TO THE READER

This book is not a novel. Yet I am convinced that a reader with imagination will not put it down until he has turned the last page. The fate of many of the documents which will be put before you has been harsh and unusual; not a few of them were carefully hidden for decades in the archives of the Russian tsarist police.

"History has its own laws, its own court, objective and impartial. The names of those who were once among the most powerful in this world are not infrequently forgotten, while particular honour is accorded to those who, for the sake of their people, made the supreme sacrifice—their life. The Decembrists—the first Russian revolutionaries—performed a remarkable feat. On 14 December 1825, they brought about, on behalf of the oppressed people, the first-ever armed uprising in Russia against absolutism. Those who had them executed—Nicholas I[1] and his entourage—described them as malefactors. Pavel Pestel, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin, Kondratii Ryleyev and Pyotr Kakhovsky ended their lives on the scaffold.

"The man who sent them to the scaffold, Nicholas I, did all in his power to ensure that the first Russian revolutionaries would be forgotten. But despite his efforts, their names were remembered." Concealed from the all-seeing eye of the police, letters written by the Decembrists while in exile were carefully preserved, and some of their contemporaries ventured to commit their reminiscences to paper. Many years after the uprising, the surviving heroes of that day of 14 December will leave their own "notes" for their descendants.

Having sealed away the files on the Decembrists, Nicholas never imagined that this very material would serve as the main evidence in their defence and against their executioner in the court of history. Time has passed its verdict. The yellowed pages of many an archive file resurrect before us the image of people endowed

with amazing character and noble hearts, true "titans hammered out of pure steel" to quote the apt description by the well-known Russian thinker and revolutionary, Alexander Herzen,[2] who enthusiastically took up their cause.

However, before beginning the story of the "phalanx of heroes of 14 December 1825", a few more words about the book itself. This is no work of fiction; to be precise, it is a collection of documents devoted to the Decembrists and their times. It tells the history of secret societies, describes the activities of the first Russian revolutionaries and how tsarism dealt with the best sons of Russia, and also shows the Decembrists during their penal servitude and in exile. The book contains extracts from memoirs, diaries, articles, letters and the statements made by the Decembrists during the investigation, as well as extracts from official documents and the memoirs of contemporaries. The reader will have the opportunity to make the acquaintance of some of the most educated and noble-minded men of their age, men possessed of enormous spiritual wealth and generosity.

As is always the case with any book composed of fragments, it is reminiscent of a mosaic: each recollection adds its own distinctive touch to the overall picture. The documents preserve the language and style of the day, and sometimes require studious attention. Therefore, in order to help the reader to find his way among the names, titles, facts and events, each section of the book is preceded by an account in which the whirl of events and twists of fate, the thoughts and passionate debates, the evaluations and impressions are logically ordered by the compiler. The notes at the end of the book will assist the reader with the more unfamiliar aspects of life in 19th-century Russia.

...And now I will leave you alone with the Decembrists and their times.

Vladimir Fyodorov

"ITS CAUSE IS THE CAUSE OF THE WHOLE OF RUSSIA."

Mikhail Lunin. "A LOOK AT THE SECRET SOCIETY IN RUSSIA (1816-1826)"

Mikhail Lunin (1787-1845), a lieutenant-colonel and one of the founders of the Union of Salvation and the Union of Welfare, belonged to the older generation of Decembrists. Lunin came from a wealthy and aristocratic family, had received an excellent education and had a gift for music and drawing. He was known to his contemporaries as a man of exceptional integrity and reckless daring who recognised no official authority. While in Paris between the years 1816 and 1819 he met the famous French utopian socialist, Saint-Simon, on whom he created a profound impression. The Decembrist Pyotr Svistunov, who knew Lunin well, wrote of him: "He was an enigmatic character made up of contradictions. He was endowed with rare qualities of mind and heart. Dauntless—that is the only word that can adequately convey that quality of his spirit bestowed on him by nature." The Supreme Criminal Court sentenced Lunin to penal servitude for life. Subsequently this was reduced to 13 years, following which he was sent into permanent exile in the remote Siberian village of Urik. While in exile Lunin continued his battle with the government: he wrote pungent political pamphlets against autocracy and prepared a series of articles for publication abroad on the history of the Secret Society of Decembrists and on the situation in Russia after 1825. He was arrested in exile, brought to trial and sent even further east—to Akatui, to the prison for hardened criminals. Four years later he died there in mysterious circumstances.

The Secret Society belongs to history. The government was correct in its assessment of this society when it said that it was an affair that concerned the whole of Russia, and that it disposed of the fates of peoples and governments. It constitutes a glowing page in the Russian chronicles similar to Magna Carta in the chronicles of the English monarchy.[1] The ten years of its clandestine existence under a suspicious and hostile government reveals the wisdom of its actions and the popular sympathy it enjoyed. The most significant portion of its labours were performed in that period, amidst dangers and obstacles. Operating by the influence of the power of reason upon the mass of the people, it was able to direct the thoughts

and feelings, even the passions of diverse social strata towards an organic reconstitution of the government itself. The major questions involved in a constitutional form of government were posed and defined in such a way that the answers would have to be found in the more or less distant future. The Society became the expression of popular interests, demanding that the laws by which the country was governed, yet which were unknown even to the courts bound to take decisions in conformity with them, be collected, rationally codified and published so that openness in public matters replace the spectre of administrative secrecy which haunted them on every side and which impeded their progress, concealing the misdeeds of public officials from both the government and the people; that the legal proceedings should be speedy, and therefore open and free of charge; that the administration should be subject to established rules and not personal whims and arbitrary decisions; that talent, in whatever class of society it be found, be called upon to co-operate for the common good, and the selection of officials be determined by public vote so that the ignorant and the corrupt might be replaced; that a public account be given of the allocation and expenditure of public money, and that the contract monopoly[2] which led to the corruption and impoverishment of the lower classes be replaced by another system of taxation; that attention be directed to the fate of the defenders of the homeland, that the number of troops and the period of service be reduced,[3] and the soldier's pay increased to match his needs; that the military settlements,[4] which had failed to achieve their initial purpose and were unlawful in their origins, be abolished in order to prevent new evils and the shedding of blood; that trade and manufacture be freed from arbitrary decisions and outdated restrictions that impeded advance; that, finally, the position of the clergy be fully secured so that they be independent and able to discharge their duties.[5]

The process of enlightenment was stimulated by the new principles which the Secret Society introduced into public thinking. It dissipated the almost universal belief that no other order of things was possible, and brought the mass of the people to an awareness of the need to replace subordination to others with obedience to the law. It sought to demonstrate the advantages of mutual responsibility, i.e. mutual guarantee, which makes the cause of each the cause of all; the importance of trial

by jury in civil and criminal cases, and its essential link with civil liberties; the need for unrestricted publicity, which must not merely be permitted but required as an obligation and secured as a right. As regards the abuse of social distinctions, a source of envy and bitterness dividing people rather than uniting them, the Secret Society moved from facts to law, pointing to the limitations placed by providence on any power: morality, intelligence, jurisprudence and the common weal—diverse manifestations of the same truth. It saw the advance of enlightenment in general as the path to internal order and justice, to external respect and might. To achieve this end it appealed to all the classes, and they understood the language it spoke. The repeated but unsystematic efforts made by the government as regards enlightenment were replaced by a simplified method not requiring expenditure and based upon a small number of rules which, should they prove erroneous, would not have harmful consequences, and should they prove correct would prevail in the future.

The Secret Society defended the right of the Greeks to independence at a time when they had been abandoned by almost all the states of Europe;[6] it raised its voice in protest against the slavery and sale of Russians, a practice that contravened the laws of God and man; finally, by its very existence and community of aspirations, it revealed that the autocracy no longer corresponded to the present state of the people, and that only a government based on the laws of justice and reason could raise that people to the position marked out for it among the civilised nations.

In those transitional periods traversed by societies in the course of their hidden movement towards a transformation in their way of life, circumstances can arise in which the intervention of men of politics, whatever their social origin, becomes essential in order to summon governments and peoples out of the stagnation that has resulted from flawed social structures and prejudices which have taken root over the course of centuries.

If such people emerge from the upper classes, then this civic activity becomes for them a duty, a means of repaying the lower classes by the use of their intellectual powers for the advantages they enjoy and which they owe to the labour and efforts of those lower classes.

They prepare new paths of improvement for future generations; they direct the people's aspirations to the

common benefit; they draw together intellectual labours undertaken in solitude and without mutual encouragement; they support the battle of ideas that is essential for general harmony, and themselves become authorities de jure and de facto by virtue of their renovating thought and their moral influence on their fellow citizens. Their ideas enrich their country, which they cultivate just as conquerors destroy the country they invade—for both good and evil are introduced into society by individuals. The sacrifice to which they doom themselves testifies to their high calling, the validity of their principles and the lawfulness of their authority.

The Secret Society met all these conditions in terms of the basis of its organisation, its aims and its methods. The moral stimulus generated by its ideas was so powerful that Emperor Alexander felt it necessary to promise that he would grant the Russians a constitution as soon as they were capable of judging its merits. (Speech delivered at the opening of the Seym in Warsaw on 15 March 1818).[7] The Secret Society welcomed such a promise with the affection and trust due to the high rank of the one who made it. It was a political pledge; in blessing the aims of the Society, it gave them renewed impetus. The Society gathered and intensified its forces to ensure that this promise should be independent of the temporary will of an individual, and taught the nation to understand and appreciate the benefits of liberty and merit them. The significance of its achievement was such that the aspirations of the Society, even after its dissolution, are to be found in every government measure and every major event of the last years.

Mistakes are inevitable in such a colossal undertaking which, on the admission of the government itself, must have amazed even those who conceived of it. These mistakes were considerable...

The opposition (i.e. the ruling party) made skilful use of these mistakes. It comprised that section of the nobility which feared the loss of its serfs and its privileges, and also foreign civil servants who feared to lose their salaries. The leaders of this party realised that these constitutional aspirations were a new wine which required new bottles; that the fall of the autocracy would bring with it the loss of their position and oblige them to lay aside their titles and honours, rather like actors after a play has proved a failure. No stone was left unturned in their attempts to deflect this blow. They succeeded

in persuading the government that the aim of the Secret Society was the assassination of the tsar and anarchy. (This idea spread among the poorly educated strata of society, who believe everything they are told to believe). However, the victorious party itself fell into an error characteristic of all parties—it over-exploited its own success. Over six hundred people were arrested and thrown into jail...

The ruling power, whose boldness baulked at nothing, finally found itself obliged to fear everything. Its overall approach was nothing other than a gradual retreat, under the cover of the gendarmerie, in the face of the spirit of the Secret Society, which was surrounding it on all sides. One may rid oneself of people, but not of ideas. The hearts of the younger generation turned to the wastes of Siberia, where those who had lost the favour of the tsar shone amidst the gloom intended to conceal them. Their lives in exile are a permanent testimony to the truth of their principles. The power of their words still makes it inadmissible that those words appear even in letters to their families. They are stripped of everything: their social status, their property, their health, their homeland, their liberty... But no one can rob them of popular sympathy towards them. It is revealed in the universal and profound respect that surrounds their grieving families, in the religious deference to the wives who share their husbands' exile, in the care with which everything written by the exiles in the spirit of a public objection is collected. The Russian mind may, for a while, be led astray, but Russian popular sentiment is not to be deceived.

*"OF REFLECTION THE NOBLE ASPIRATION."**

"...Every age has its distinctive feature. The present age is marked by revolutionary ideas... The spirit of change is, so to speak, causing minds everywhere to simmer."

Pavel Pestel

*** A line from the poem "To Siberia" written by Pushkin and dedicated to the Decembrists.**

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

"Russia witnessed the first revolutionary movement against tsarism in 1825..." (V. I. Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, Moscow, 1977).

I would like, as a historian, to begin my account of the first Russian revolutionaries with this assessment by Lenin. My account of these outstanding aristocrat-officers—many of them were wealthy and of noble origin—who, on 14 December 1825, brought the insurgent Guards regiments out onto Senate Square in St Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, in order to make their fearless challenge to tsarism, achieve the overthrow of absolutism and free the people both from feudal institutions and also the enslavement of the peasants. Therefore even today, when the first socialist state has celebrated its seventieth anniversary, Lenin's assessment of the Decembrist movement retains its validity.

Bourgeois historiographers, sometimes unwittingly, more often deliberately, frequently present the October Revolution as a rebellion by a handful of conspirators, as a coup imposed on the Russian people by the Bolsheviks, as a fortuitous event, historically premature and lacking objective and national roots. However, the facts incontrovertibly demonstrate that the October Socialist Revolution was an inevitable stage in the historical development of Russia which opened up a new era in the history of mankind—the era of the communist (socio-economic) formation. It was the natural culmination of the Russian revolutionary-liberation movement, its final fruit, its consummation.

Thus the October Revolution is quite rightly seen as having its starting point on that day of 14 December 1825.

Lenin, Russian intellectual, a thinker of genius and outstanding leader of the world proletariat, highly appraised the achievement of the Decembrists, accurately

defining their place in the history of the Russian revolutionary struggle. Drawing on considerable documentary evidence, he convincingly demonstrated that the revolutionary-liberation movement in Russia comprised three generations of revolutionaries. The first stage in the Russian revolution—from 1825 to 1861—is described by Lenin as aristocratic: "These revolutionaries formed but a narrow group. They were very far removed from the people"; the second—from 1861 to 1895—he described as bourgeois-democratic; the third—the proletarian stage—began in 1895.

"The most outstanding figures of the aristocratic period," he emphasised, "were the Decembrists and Herzen."

Why should Lenin have assessed so highly the work of the revolutionary aristocrats? Even before the Decembrists, Russia had known major peasant uprisings and popular wars under the leadership of Stepan Razin, Yemelyan Pugachov...[1] Yes, indeed it had, but these were either spontaneous manifestations by the peasant masses not enlightened by a consciously formulated political programme, or actions undertaken by solitary revolutionaries.

The Decembrists were the first in Russia to create a revolutionary organisation, formulate a political programme, prepare for and carry through an uprising against the feudal and absolutist system. That uprising lasted only six hours. The forces were unequal: against three thousand revolutionary soldiers and officers Nicholas sent twelve thousand infantry and cavalry troops. The roar of cannon put an end to the rebellion. Tsarism celebrated its victory over the "insurgents". Official propaganda sought to present the events of 14 December as something fortuitous and not corresponding to the spirit of the Russian people, who were supposedly "devoted to the tsar and the throne", and the Decembrists themselves as a "band of bloodthirsty" regicides. Their noble ideas were described as "an infection brought in from outside". Gavriil Batenkov, who took part in the insurrection, boldly told the tsarist judges: "The attempted uprising on 14 December is not a mutiny, but the first experiment in political revolution in Russia, an experiment considered honourable in the social history and in the eyes of other enlightened peoples." History has refuted the official, wholly false view of the Decembrist movement. However, the belief that it lacked a basis,

that it was entirely the product of the influence of West-European ideas, continued in Russian pre-revolutionary historical literature as it still does in such literature abroad. Such an estimation of the Decembrist movement is presented, for example, by the American historians Anatole Mazour and Mark Raeff, by the French historians Georges Luciani and André Maury, and by certain others.

The Decembrist movement was a Russian phenomenon which arose on Russian soil and was caused by the objective historical development of Russia.

The imperial Committee of Enquiry,[2] before which the Decembrists appeared following the defeat of the insurrection, attempted to find out where this "spirit of free-thinking" had come from, what circumstances had compelled young and promising officers to gather in secret organisations. In their testimonies, the Decembrists constantly emphasised that the main reasons for their "free-thinking" were serfdom or, as they called it, the "slavery" of the peasants, and the arbitrary police rule of the autocracy, neither of which was compatible with the "natural rights" of man. "The slavery of the peasants had always affected me deeply," said Pavel Pestel, an outstanding member of the Decembrist movement. "The injustice, violence and oppression of the landowners towards their peasants strengthened revolutionary ideas in my mind," wrote another well-known Decembrist, Pyotr Borisov, in his testimony. The poverty and lack of rights suffered by the working people, the arbitrary rule of the authorities, the secrecy of the courts, the venality of officials—all of this, in the eyes of the Decembrists and all progressive people of the day, presented a picture of the "universal ill" of Russia.

A characteristic feature of the social structure in Russia at the time of the Decembrists was the sharp division of the population into privileged and non-privileged classes. The main privileged class—the nobility—was officially termed "the noble class, the most loyal support of the throne". The nobleman was exempt from taxation and duties, from corporal punishment (the law emphasised that "corporal punishment does not affect the nobleman") and from conscription. The privileges enjoyed by the nobility as the "highest class" were extensive. They alone occupied all commanding posts in the military and civil services; they had priority right to education in secondary and higher institutes of learning. How-

ever, the main privilege of the nobleman was his right to own land and peasants (termed his serfs). The nobleman who owned land and peasants (an estate) was termed a landowner. Around a hundred thousand landowning families in Russia owned more than 20 million peasants. Though termed serfs, their position was all but indistinguishable from that of a slave: the peasant was in fact the property of the landowner. The landowner determined the size of the peasant's allotment, could impose on him any duties he wished, take from him all his possessions. He could sell him, pawn him, give him away, stake him in a game of cards. He could send the peasant to Siberia, subject him to severe corporal punishment. The peasant was forbidden to lodge a complaint against the landowner. "Our peasants can complain only to God", were the bitter words written by the Decembrist Nikolai Turgenev.

Progressive and educated people of their day, the Decembrists were the first to realise that serfdom and autocracy were the main causes of the tragic position of the people and the backwardness of the country. Thus they saw the abolition of serfdom and the autocracy as the prime goal in the profoundly patriotic task of saving Russia. The Decembrists called themselves "true and loyal sons of their Fatherland". In the movement of the first Russian revolutionaries, ideas of liberation were closely bound up with patriotic sentiments and, to a large degree, flowed from them.

The Decembrists belonged to the generation of aristocratic revolutionaries. They composed a small section of the more educated and progressive nobility. For the most part, however, the Russian aristocracy remained a conservative class which supported serfdom and was loyal to the throne. The historical merit of the Decembrists lies in the fact that they were able to rise above their class interests, reject their class privileges and go deliberately to their death in the name of noble and elevated ideals. They were distinguished by genuine chivalry and nobility of spirit, by purity of heart, a high sense of honour and brotherhood. They sacrificed all they possessed, the privileges they inherited by virtue of their origins and position, and even their lives, in the name of a noble and sacred cause, that of freeing the country from tyranny. "There can be no doubt," wrote the Decembrist Pyotr Svistunov, "that those who conceived of a revolution in Russia inevitably risked the loss of all the advantages

that they enjoyed as a result of their position in society; therefore there can be no suggestion that they acted out of selfishness or ambition. Only fervent love for their homeland and the desire to secure its greatness by securing for it all the benefits of liberty can explain their readiness to sacrifice themselves and their future. Given the discrepancy between the means and the aim pursued, people may describe their vast undertaking as a mad dream in practical terms, but they have no right to question the purity of their motives."

Fyodor Rostopchin, Governor-General of Moscow, quipped: "In France cobblers and ragmen wanted to become counts and princes, here it is the counts and princes who wanted to become cobblers and ragmen". This courtier, bowing in fawning servility before the monarch, found the noble civic exploit of the Decembrists strange and incomprehensible, as he did also their noble motives and self-sacrifice.

The Decembrists bequeathed to the future cultural and moral values of perennial importance. The aristocratic revolutionaries included not a few highly gifted men—prominent representatives of progressive Russian culture: the poets Kondratii Ryleyev, Alexander Odoyevsky, Alexander Bestuzhev (Marlinsky), Wilhelm Küchelbecker and Fyodor Glinka, the scholar and artist Nikolai Bestuzhev, the economists and essayists Nikolai Turgenev and Mikhail Orlov, the sculptor Fyodor Tolstoy, the historian Alexander Kornilovich. Russian culture, in the broadest sense of the term, was not only the spiritual and moral groundwork of the Decembrist movement, but was also embodied by it and raised by it to a new level. The reputation enjoyed by the Decembrists as being among the most educated men of their age is not a legend. This reputation emerged during their own lifetime and was the natural source of their authority among their contemporaries. They exerted an extraordinarily powerful influence not only on all aspects of the socio-political and cultural life of their own day, but of the period that followed. The names of such outstanding Russian poets as Pushkin and Griboyedov are inseparably linked with the Decembrist movement. In his well-known comedy *Wit Works Woe*, Griboyedov gave a talented and penetrating picture of the age of the Decembrists, of the conflict between the progressive younger generation, which included the first Russian revolutionaries, and the defenders of the old ways. The play was forbidden by the

censor and was circulated in copies. The verse of Pushkin, filled with a love of freedom, were also copied by hand and passed around. There was virtually no army officer who did not know these verse by heart. When the enquiry into the Decembrist affair was underway, Vasilii Zhukovsky, a poet and friend of Pushkin, wrote to him: "Your verse have been found among the papers of all those involved [the Decembrists under investigation.—*Comp.*]. This is a poor way of remaining on good terms with the government." In the autumn of 1826 Pushkin was summoned by Nicholas I.

"Pushkin, would you have taken part in the events of 14 December if you had been in St Petersburg?" asked the tsar.

"Certainly, Sire, all my friends were in the conspiracy, and I could not have failed to take part in it."

Pushkin was not a member of the Secret Society, but he is inseparable from the Decembrists, as they are from him.

The Decembrists described themselves as "the children of 1812", repeating more than once that 1812 marked the awakening of their political awareness. Napoleon's march on Russia had provoked an unparalleled surge of patriotic sentiment throughout the country, which rose up against the invader in what was a patriotic war of liberation. Among those who joined in the battle were more than a hundred future Decembrists; of these 65—men whom, in 1825, the tsar and his ruling circles will term "state criminals"—had taken part in the life-and-death battle of Borodino, just outside Moscow.

The popular nature of the War of 1812 was the main reason for Napoleon's defeat. Russia was the only country capable of defeating the aggressor. The crushing defeat of Napoleon's army in Russia, and the transfer in 1813 of the field of military operations to Western Europe was the signal for a general uprising against the rule of Napoleon. Thus the Russian War of 1812 led not only to the liberation of Russia from foreign invasion, but also the liberation of the peoples of Europe from the Napoleonic yoke.

However, the victory won by the Russian people was of more than purely military significance: it also had a powerful effect upon every aspect of the social, political and cultural life of the country, encouraged the growth of national self-consciousness, and provided a powerful stimulus to the development of progressive social

thought. The war put the question of the destiny of Russia before the Decembrists in acute form, revealed the vast potential of the Russian people, who, so the Decembrists believed, having freed the country from foreign invasion, must sooner or later find the strength to free themselves from internal tyranny by throwing off the yoke of serfdom. "Napoleon invaded Russia, and it was then that the Russian people first became aware of their strength; then the sentiment of independence, first political, and then popular, was aroused in every heart. That was the beginning of free-thinking in Russia," the Decembrists were to declare later. "The popular war," wrote the Decembrist Andrei Rozen, "evoked a confidence in the strength of the people and in their patriotic enthusiasm such as no one until then had realised or even anticipated."

At the same time, the best representatives of Russia saw that the people, having carried on their shoulders the burden of that war, remained serfs; those who had fought in the volunteer corps returned home to bondage. "We shed our blood," they said, "and we are once again forced into the sweated labour of the corvée. We freed our native land from the tyrant and our masters are once more tyrannising over us."

Political reaction in the country intensified. There was increased censorship and repression of enlightenment: any expression of a desire for freedom was persecuted. This reactionary government policy was felt in everything, and provoked universal discontent. The Decembrist Alexander Bestuzhev wrote: "The soldiers complained about exhaustion from their training, about having to clean their equipment and about guard duty; the officers complained about low pay and excessive discipline; the sailors complained about tedious duties; the naval officers about having nothing to do. Talented people complained that their road to promotion was blocked by those who demanded nothing except silent obedience; scholars complained that they were prevented from teaching, and young people complained that they were prevented from learning. In short, all around one could see discontented faces, there were whispers everywhere—everyone was asking where it would all lead to. Every element was in ferment." Over Russia there hung the dark shadow of the all-powerful Arakcheyev, the tsar's ruthless favourite[3] to whom Alexander I[4] had virtually entrusted the government of the country.

One of the most reactionary measures taken by the

autocracy was the creation in 1816 of military settlements. They were supposedly created to simplify the maintenance of the army. In addition to their military service, the soldiers had to farm the land and thereby supply their own food. This measure was implemented by Count Arakcheyev. Innumerable villages, large and small, were turned into military settlements, and the peasants who lived in them found themselves doomed to military service for life. Troop regiments were also billeted in them. The soldiers married the local women. It was militarised serfdom, even harsher than that on the landed estates. The introduction of these military settlements provoked bitter opposition among the peasants. In 1819 twenty-eight thousand settlement-dwellers rose up in rebellion in the south of the country. Arakcheyev himself, accompanied by two divisions and artillery, marched out to suppress it. Hundreds of those who had taken part in the rebellion were put on trial, and dozens were flogged to death.

The introduction of military settlements and the harsh punishments meted out to those who resisted caused indignation in progressive society inside Russia. "The very thought of the military settlements fills every decent soul with pain and horror," wrote Pavel Pestel, one of the leaders of the Decembrist movement. "The military settlements embody the most cruel injustice that malign power could conceive of." In his Draft Constitution, Pestel saw as the "prime duty" of a future revolutionary government "the abolition of the military settlements and the liberation from their dreadful yoke of all the villagers who now belong to them."

The Decembrists were contemporaries of and witnesses to major revolutionary and military events. The liberation wars waged by the peoples of Europe between 1812 and 1815 against Napoleonic aggression; the revolutions in Spain, Portugal and the Kingdom of Naples in 1820, and in northern Italy in 1821; the uprising in Greece which began that same year in support of national independence; the wave of national liberation rebellions in the colonies of Latin America—all this exerted a powerful influence on the formation of the Decembrist revolutionary ideology. "...Every age has its distinctive feature," wrote Pavel Pestel. "The present age is marked by revolutionary ideas. From one end of Europe to the other the same thing is to be seen, from Portugal to Russia, without the exception of a single state, even England

and Turkey, those two opposites. The same spectacle is presented by the whole of America. The spirit of change is, so to speak, causing minds everywhere to simmer. It is this, I suggest, that has given rise to revolutionary ideas and rules and caused them to take root in people's minds."

The Decembrist movement was an integral part of that world-wide revolutionary process. In their programme demands the Decembrists reflected fundamental historical tasks which had been brought to the fore at that time by the objective conditions of Russian development, but in the formulation of their political programmes they also made use of the revolutionary experience of Europe. The communication of ideas between the Russian Decembrists and progressive West European thought was due to the pursuit of common goals in the Russian and West European liberation struggle—those of abolishing feudal institutions and absolutist regimes. Many future Decembrists had taken part in the campaigns of 1813-1814, and this had brought them into contact with progressive ideas and new political institutions in those countries where revolutions had occurred. This broadened their political horizons and compelled them to ponder the position of Russia. They became increasingly interested in the political and philosophical writings of West European thinkers, in political economy, ancient and modern history, and in the state organisation of West European countries. The most popular writers were Rousseau, Montesquieu, Benjamin Constant, Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say, Guillaume Raynal—famous European enlighteners and economists of the 18th century. In their writings, progressive Russians sought an answer to the vexed question of the causes of social injustice and the ways in which to organise a free and just social and political order. We should emphasise at this point that these "ideas from the West" did not give birth to the Decembrist movement. Rather, by carefully studying the experience gained during the revolutions in Western Europe at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, and the achievements of West European socio-political and philosophical thought, the Decembrists were then able to formulate their own independent and original solutions so essential for the Russia of their day.

Ivan Yakushkin recalled that all honest people "who recognised the evil manifest all around them and which grew, unhindered, with each day" could only "gather

more closely together in a tight circle, cultivating as best as they could the seeds of goodness, and become, in the end, the bastion defending truth and right". Thus there gradually emerged the idea of the need for a secret organisation, the aim of which would be to struggle to achieve social and political freedom.

On 9 February 1816, in one of the barracks of the Semyonovsky Life-Guards Regiment, several Guards officers met together: Nikita Muravyov, Sergei Trubetskoy, Ivan Yakushkin and two brothers—Matvei and Sergei Muravyov-Apostol. It was a day that would become memorable in the history of Russia. This group of young officers laid the foundations of the first Secret Society, which they called the Union of Salvation (for it was necessary to save Russia from the evils caused by serfdom and arbitrary autocratic rule). A little later it was given the name the Society of the True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland. This society was then joined by Pavel Pestel, Ivan Pushchin and Mikhail Lunin, who were later to play major roles in the Decembrist movement. Each was to pay a harsh penalty, each would be marked down by the pitiless vengeance of the tsar and sentenced in court.

The first Decembrist organisation was relatively small —it had no more than 30 members. Although the main aim—the introduction of a constitution and the abolition of serfdom—was already defined, they had still not determined on their methods of struggle, nor had they drawn up a detailed programme of political change. There were plans to compel the government to adopt a constitution by means of an open demonstration at the coronation of the new tsar—they would refuse to take the oath of allegiance unless he accepted the constitution. Then came the plan for a conspiracy against the tsar.

In August 1817, the tsar's court, together with the Life-Guards, moved from St Petersburg to Moscow to take part in the official celebrations to mark the fifth anniversary of the victory over Napoleon in 1812. Among the Life-Guards who accompanied the tsar were almost all the members of the Decembrist organisation. About that time they heard of the savage reprisals against the peasants who had opposed the transformation of their villages into military settlements, and also rumours that Emperor Alexander I was planning further harsh measures. This news provoked a wave of indignation among the members of the Secret Society. They formed a plan for immediate action which was to begin with the assassi-

nation of the tsar. However, the majority of the members of the Secret Society expressed opposition to this plan: the secret organisation was not yet ready for a coup d'état. It was decided to abandon the idea of immediate action, but to set up, on the basis of the Union of Salvation, a new and broader organisation.

This new organisation was founded in January, 1818, in Moscow, and was called the Union of Welfare. The membership had now risen to more than 200. Soon it had branches in St Petersburg, Moscow, Tambov and, in the south, in Kishinev, Tulchin, Poltava and elsewhere. The Main Council—the ruling body of the Secret Society—was in St Petersburg. Decembrist circles were considerably larger than the official membership of the organisation. The leader of the Kishinev branch of the Union of Welfare, Vladimir Rayevsky, stated: "Many worthy people were not accepted simply because their sympathy towards the Secret Society was already known." Not a few progressively-minded people who were not formally members of the Secret Society shared the Society's views, knew about its existence and were in close association with its members.

The Union of Welfare adopted a detailed body of regulations known as the Green Book. The first part of these regulations has survived to this day and contains a detailed exposition of the Society's organisational principles and a comprehensive programme of concrete action. The first task was defined as being the education of "public opinion" which, according to the Decembrists, was the motive force of history. This concept of public opinion as the force which directs society had already been put forward by the French Enlighteners in the 18th century and had won wide acceptance in the European revolutionary movement at the end of that century and the beginning of the next. Progressive public opinion, so the Decembrists believed, must precede a revolution, prepare for it and become its driving force. The members of the Union of Welfare launched a major propaganda campaign: they spoke against serfdom, against the military settlements created by Arakcheyev, against unjust judges and venal officials; they created legal and semi-legal enlightenment and literary societies (including the Green Lamp of which Pushkin was a member). Thus the activity of the Union of Welfare spread outwards and served as a focal point for all those who were discontent with the regime.

In subsequent years in the Union of Welfare a group of more radically-minded Decembrists led by Pavel Pestel came to the forefront. This group demanded decisive measures and preparation for revolutionary action in the near future. "Citizens! It is not feeble measures that we need, but a decisive and unexpected blow!" Vladimir Rayevsky told the other members of the Society.

At the beginning of 1820 the Secret Society, on the suggestion of Pestel, decided to make the achievement of a republic its main political aim. It also adopted a new tactic of preparing for a revolutionary coup by means of "military revolution", that is, by a military uprising without the involvement of the civilian population. A military revolution, in the opinion of the Decembrists, who were for the most part military men themselves and members of the nobility by social origin, would prevent "a spontaneous and bloody popular uprising", and would be "more organised, more rapid, less painful and less bloody". Later the plan for such a coup was elaborated—the military uprising was to begin in St Petersburg, and military action among the troops quartered in outlying districts would support it.

At the end of 1820 and the beginning of 1821 the government learned about the existence of the Secret Society. It also discovered the names of some of its members. Therefore, in January 1821, a congress of representatives of the branches of the Union of Welfare was held in Moscow. It was decided to go through a mock dissolution of the Society and, under this pretext, to weed out the hesitant and unreliable members in order to create a more effective, strictly conspiratorial society. The Decembrists also hoped that this would serve to quench the suspicions of the government.

In March 1821, a Southern Society organised by Pavel Pestel appeared among the army regiments quartered in the Ukraine. At the same time, on the initiative of Nikita Muravyov, the first steps were being taken in St Petersburg to create a Northern Society, the organisation of which was completed in 1822.

The Southern Society grew rapidly. "We often gathered together, discussed, argued, reasoned, told each other about our cherished plans and aspirations, passed on everything which was of interest to our common cause, and, naturally, not infrequently spoke quite freely, indeed unguardedly, about the government. There was

no end to the suggestions and theories. Of course, Pestel took the lead in these discussions. His quick, logical mind guided our talk and often reconciled disagreement", recalled Nikolai Basargin.

The Northern Society was invigorated by the arrival in 1823 of Kondratii Ryleyev, who immediately rose to a leading position within it. Ryleyev was one of the most sincere and enthusiastic members of the Society, a man of resolute action, yet also of exceptional charm. He produced an unforgettable impression on everyone. He quickly gathered round him a group of bold and determined supporters. It was thanks to the energy of this group, and above all of Ryleyev himself, that the insurrection of 14 December was prepared and carried through.

In 1824 an agreement was reached on the unification of the Southern and Northern Societies, and a date was set for a joint armed uprising—the summer of 1826. It was decided to use the occasion of an imperial inspection of the troops in order to seize the tsar and bring out the troops in rebellion. The members of both Societies began to prepare their soldiers.

At the end of the summer of 1825, during their preparations for the uprising, the members of the Southern Society learned of the existence of yet another secret organisation—the Society of Associated Slavs. This organisation had been set up in 1823 in the Ukraine by the two young brothers and officers Andrei and Pyotr Borisov, and the Polish student Julian Lublinski.

The aim of the Society of Associated Slavs was the creation of a federation of ten democratic Slav republics.[5] At the beginning of September, 1825, the Society of Associated Slavs merged with the Southern Society, within which it constituted the Slavic Council (branch). It became the most effective of the "councils" of the Southern Society, conducting propaganda among the soldiers and preparing for an armed uprising. The members of this "council" were later among the most active participants in the insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment in the south of the country.[6]

In the summer and autumn of 1825 information was finding its way to the government about the Secret Society of Decembrists. The first informer, Ivan Sherwood, was only able to say that the organisation existed; the second—Alexander Boshnyak—named some of the members of the Southern Society, including its leader,

Pestel. This information was received in the October of 1825. The illness and death of Alexander I prevented rapid action against the organisation. Far more dangerous for the Decembrists was the third informer—Arkadii Maiboroda. Maiboroda served directly under Pestel and was consequently in possession of a great deal of information. The chief-of-staff, Ivan Dibich, immediately passed the information on to St Petersburg, to the new Tsar, Nicholas I, and himself moved to have the conspirators arrested. The Southern Society found itself under attack; on the day before the insurrection, 13 December 1825, Pavel Pestel, Alexei Yushnevsky and Fyodor Vadkovsky were arrested.

Events were moving rapidly to their culmination...

"I WAS FILLED WITH BURNING ZEAL, AND DESIRED GOOD WITH ALL MY HEART."

Pavel Pestel on the Formation of His Revolutionary Views. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry[1]

"...I was closely acquainted with Pavel Pestel,[2] and I will state frankly that my opinion of him is based upon the most favourable facts. When he died he was 31 years old. He was the eldest son of the reputed Pestel, Governor-General of Siberia, received a fine education and graduated from the rank of court page to that of Guards officer in 1811, together with the present court minister. In the campaign of 1812 he served as an adjutant under Count Witgenstein,[3] and drew attention with his zeal and efficiency; he fought with distinction in many battles and even, it seems, was wounded. He was considered a competent and talented officer.

Having returned to Russia a staff captain of the Guards decorated with many marks of distinction, he continued to serve under the Count and was in charge of his personal office, in which post he enjoyed the Count's total confidence.

As a member of the Society of which he was one of the founders, he became a tireless student of political and economic sciences, devoting to these studies the whole of his free time. Possessed of a remarkable mind, the gift of oratory, and in particular the ability to express his thoughts clearly and logically, he had considerable influence over his army colleagues and all those with whom he was on close terms. I first made his acquaintance and became his friend in 1820, in Tulchin, then the Main Headquarters of the 2nd Army. At the time he had a dominant influence over all the young people and made use of that influence not out of pride, but in order to promote the Society and its aims, himself prepared

to make any sacrifices for this cause. I am even aware of one of his actions which does him great honour. He was prepared to sacrifice all the benefits of his military service in order to achieve a result that would have been useful for the Society. However, in the event this did not happen. For all his intellectual brilliance, Pestel also had his faults. The desire to bring others under the dominion of his ideas was one of them. Furthermore, he was frequently carried away in serious political debates and took his conclusions and hypothetical deductions to their extreme.

Apart from these faults, I know of no other reproach to bring against him. As I now recall how he conducted himself in the Society during the time we lived in Tulchin, I can find nothing with which to accuse him. That he acted directly, honourably, without any designs as regards himself, that he saw the Society not as a means of his own advance, but as a means of achieving the desired results for the benefit of Russia—this I not only do not doubt, but am prepared to assert anywhere at any time. Judging him as a man, one can find in him many weaknesses, flaws, deviations from the rigorous laws of morality, but even here integrity, unselfishness, indifference to the material benefits and requirements of life, were distinguishing features of his character. As a member of the Society, as a man of politics who was the first to conceive of a social revolution in Russia not for the benefit of an individual, but for the benefit of the people—he, apart from the faults I have already mentioned and which did not depend on him personally—was, in my opinion, wholly irreproachable. I could support my conclusion with many details from his life in Tulchin, but I leave it to our descendants to examine and assess this remarkable man of his day."

Nikolai Basargin

...I can name no one to whom I could ascribe in person my introduction to free-thinking and liberal ideas, nor can I determine the precise moment when they first arose within me: for this did not happen suddenly, but little by little, and at first without my being myself aware of it. However, I have the honour to inform the Committee of the following with the most sincere candour. When I had acquired sufficient grounding in the political sciences, I became deeply attracted to them. I was filled with burning zeal, and desired good with all my heart. I saw that the prosperity or misfortune of kingdoms and peoples is dependent to a considerable degree on the government, and this conviction further encouraged my inclination to those sciences which discuss such matters and indicate the path to be taken. To begin with, however, I undertook the study of these

sciences, as I did the reading of political books in general, timidly and without any predisposition to free-thinking, but with the sole desire of being of service at some time and in some place to my monarch and my country. Continuing thus my studies, I then began to consider whether the rules of political science were observed in the government of Russia, without, however, yet thinking about its supreme authority, but about the ministries, local administration, individual officials and the like. In so doing I then discovered what appeared to me to be numerous deviations from the rules of political science, and I began to ponder many things: by what enactments they could be replaced, supplemented or improved. I also directed my thoughts and attention to the position of the people, the slavery of the peasants having, moreover, always strongly affected me, as did the considerable privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy, which I considered to be, so to speak, a wall standing between the monarch and the people, and concealing from the monarch the true position of the people for its own benefit. To this were later added thoughts on various other matters and questions, such as: the advantages enjoyed by other annexed regions,[4] what I had heard about the military settlements, the decline of trade, industry and national prosperity, the injustice and venality of judges and other officials, the burden of military service borne by the soldiers, and many other subjects which deserved, in my opinion, to be each an individual cause of discontent and which, when added together, presented themselves to my mind and imagination as a veritable picture of national ill. Then it was that my internal murmurings against the government began.

The restoration of the House of Bourbon to the throne of France[5] and my reflections on this event may be described as a turning point in my political opinions, concepts and manner of thinking: for I began to reason that the greater part of the fundamental enactments introduced by the revolution were, on the restoration of the monarchy, preserved and recognised as beneficient, although everyone had opposed the revolution, and I myself had always opposed it. This consideration then led me to the thought that revolution, so it would appear, is not the great evil it is said to be, and that it might even prove quite beneficial, in which opinion I was further confirmed by yet another argument, namely that those states

in which there had been no revolution continued to be deprived of such benefits and institutions, and I began to form, almost at one and the same time, constitutional and revolutionary ideas. My constitutional ideas were wholly monarchist, while my revolutionary ideas were weak and shadowy. Little by little the first became more clearly defined, and the second more powerful. My reading of political books strengthened and stimulated within me all these opinions, thoughts and ideas. The dreadful events which took place in France during the revolution[6] obliged me to seek the means of avoiding the same, and this then led to the idea of a provisional government and the need for it, and to my constant talk of the possible prevention of all internecine strife.

I was drawn from a constitutional monarchist to a republican manner of thinking by the following matters and considerations: the essay in French by Destutt de Tracy[7] exerted a powerful effect on me. He shows that any government in which the head of state is one individual, and particularly if this office is hereditary, must inevitably end in despotism... I recalled the golden age of Greece, when it was composed of republics, and its pitiable condition thereafter. I compared the majestic fame of Rome in the days of the republic with its lamentable fate under the government of the emperors. The history of Novgorod the Great[8] also confirmed me in my republican thoughts. I found that in France and in England the constitutions are but a veil which in no way prevents the ministry in England and the king in France from doing exactly as they please, and in this respect I preferred autocracy to such a constitution, since in an autocratic government, I reasoned, the unrestricted power is visible to all, whereas in constitutional monarchies there is also lack of restriction, although it is slower of operation, but therefore also incapable of correcting what is wrong so quickly. As for the two chambers, they exist merely as a veil, that is, to conceal the truth. It seemed to me that the main tendency of the present age lay in the struggle between the mass of the population and aristocracies of every kind, those of wealth, and those founded on inheritance. I argued that these aristocracies finally become more powerful than the monarch himself, as had happened in England, that they constitute the chief obstacle to the well-being of the state, and that, moreover, they can be removed only by a republican ordering of the state.

Events in Naples, Spain and Portugal then also influenced me greatly.[9] I saw in them what was, in my opinion, indisputable evidence of the instability of monarchical constitutions and sufficient reasons for mistrusting the genuine agreement of monarchs with the constitutions which they implemented. These last considerations significantly strengthened my republican and revolutionary thinking. Therefore I ask the Committee to note that I was confirmed in my thinking by both the reading of books and my reflections on various events, and also by the fact that many of my fellow-members in the Society shared this way of thinking with me. All of this caused me to become a convinced republican, and I saw no greater benefit and blessing for Russia than a republican government. When I discussed this matter with other members who shared my views, we, representing to ourselves the vivid picture of the great happiness that Russia would then, in our belief, enjoy, were so filled with enthusiasm and, one might say, exultation, that I and others were prepared not only to agree with, but ourselves to propose anything that could assist the full introduction and implementation of this order of things, paying nonetheless great attention to the elimination and prevention of all anarchy, disorder and strife, of which I was always the most zealous opponent...

Political books are to be found in everyone's hands; the political sciences are taught everywhere, political news reaches every corner. These teach everyone to judge the actions and deeds of government: to praise one and revile another. The events of 1812, 13, 14 and 15, as events in the previous and later years, showed so many thrones overturned, so many others restored, so many kingdoms destroyed, so many new ones founded, so many kings sent into exile, so many revolutions achieved, so many coups accomplished, that all these events acquainted people's minds with revolutions, with the possibilities and conveniences to carry them out. Moreover, every age has its distinctive feature. The present age is marked by revolutionary ideas. From one end of Europe to the other the same thing is to be seen, from Portugal to Russia, without the exception of a single state, even England and Turkey, those two opposites. The same spectacle is presented by the whole of America. The spirit of change is, so to speak, causing minds everywhere to simmer (fait bouillir les esprits). It is this, I suggest, that has given

rise to revolutionary ideas and rules and caused them to take root in people's minds. As to the spread of the spirit of change throughout the state, this cannot be ascribed to our Society, as it has been too small in number to have any such universal influence, but it must be ascribed, I suggest, to the general causes set forth above and which have acted on other minds as they have on those of members of the Society. Perhaps this was further encouraged by the spirit of discontent operating quite independently of the Secret Society.

"I MAKE SO BOLD AS TO PUT BEFORE YOU THE HISTORICAL PATH OF FREE-THINKING IN RUSSIA."

A Letter from Alexander Bestuzhev to Emperor Nicholas I from the SS Peter and Paul Fortress[1]

Alexander Bestuzhev (1797-1837) was a well-known Decembrist, a member of the Northern Society, and took an active part in the insurrection on 14 December 1825. He was also a famous poet who published his writings under the pseudonym of Marlinsky, and was a friend of Pushkin, Griboyedov and Ryleyev. Following the defeat of the insurrection, he gave himself up voluntarily. As one of the "chief criminals" he was kept in irons during the investigations. He was sentenced to death, which was then commuted to 20 years penal servitude. After the sentence had been pronounced, Bestuzhev was transferred to a fortress in Finland, and then to the north. From there, in 1829, he was transferred as a private to active service in the Caucasus, where he was killed in battle in 1837.

Your Imperial Majesty!

Confident that Your Majesty loves the truth, I make so bold as to put before you the historical path of free-thinking in Russia, and in general many concepts which composed the moral and political part of the undertaking of 14 December. I shall speak with an open heart, without concealing what is wrong and without even softening the language, for the duty of a loyal subject is to tell the monarch the truth as it is. And now I shall begin.

The beginning of the reign of Emperor Alexander was marked by the most brilliant prospects for the well-being of Russia. The nobility had rested, the merchants

had no complaints as to credit, army service made no excessive demands, scholars studied whatever they pleased; everyone said what they thought and everyone hoped that from all this good would come something even better. Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit this to happen, and hopes withered unfulfilled. The unsuccessful war of 1807 and many other costly failures[2] led to financial disorders; but this was not noted amidst the preparations for the war against Napoleon. Finally Napoleon invaded Russia, and it was then that the Russian people first became aware of their strength; then the sentiment of independence, first political, and then popular, was aroused in every heart. That was the beginning of free-thinking in Russia. The government itself declared: "freedom, liberation!" It spread abroad writings on Napoleon's abuse of unrestricted power, and the call of the Russian monarch resounded on the banks of the Rhine and the Seine. The war had still not finished when the warriors, returning home, began to voice their complaints among the popular classes. "We shed our blood," they said, "and we are once again forced into the sweated labour of the corvée. We freed our native land from the tyrant and our masters are once more tyrannising over us." The returning troops, from generals to privates, could talk of nothing else than how good life was in foreign lands. The comparison with our own land naturally led to the question: why is it not so here? At first, while this was spoken of without hindrance, it was wafted away by the wind, for the mind, like gunpowder, is only dangerous when compressed. The ray of hope that His Imperial Majesty would provide a constitution, as he had promised at the opening of the Seym in Warsaw, and the attempt by some generals to free their slaves [serfs.—*Comp.*] still flattered the hopes of many. However, in 1817 everything changed. Those who saw what was wrong or who hoped for something better were obliged to talk in secret by reason of the numerous spies, and thus the secret societies began. The restrictions placed by officialdom on distinguished officers led to disillusionment. The military began to say: Did we liberate Europe in order to fasten its chains upon ourselves? Did we give France a constitution so that we ourselves would not dare to speak of one for Russia, and did we with our blood take first place among the nations of Europe in order to be humiliated at home? The persecution of enlightenment obliged people, in their hope-

lessness, to think of the most important measures. And as the murmuring of the people, caused by exhaustion and abuse, brought with it the menace of bloody revolution, the Society resolved to prevent a greater evil with a lesser, and to begin its actions at the first convenient opportunity. I will now describe how we saw the position of Russia.

The troops of Napoleon, like locusts, left behind them long-lasting seeds of destruction. Many gubernias were impoverished, and the government, by the slowness of its measures or the paucity of its assistance, left them to perish entirely. In other regions, rains and draughts led to famine. The construction of unreliable roads occupied the hands of one third of Russia while wheat rotted in the fields. The abuses of the district police officers became more evident to the impoverished peasants, and their oppression by the nobility became more painful as they had begun to understand their rights as people.* The multiplication of drinking houses corrupted morals and destroyed peasant life. The [military.—*Comp.*] settlements paralysed not only minds and thoughts in those places where they were established, but filled the rest with horror. The frequent movement of troops placed an unbearable burden on those who lived along their route; lack of money meant that the peasants were unable to pay their taxes—in a word, all regretted former years, all murmured against the present, all hoped for better times... Whole villages departed to take to the road, and numerous bursts of indignation among the corvée serfs marked the last three years of the reign of Alexander.

The petty bourgeoisie, a large and respected class in all other countries, is in Russia small, poor, burdened with obligations, deprived of the means of existence...

The merchant class, restricted within its guilds[3] and faced with difficulties in the delivery of goods, suffered a major blow in 1812. The colossal fortunes of many were destroyed, others went bankrupt, yet others lost heart...

* The behaviour of Russian nobles in this respect is outrageous. Negroes working on plantations are more fortunate than many serfs. The sale of peasants independently of their families, the violation of peasant girls, the corruption of peasant wives—all this is done quite openly and considered of no significance. There are even monsters who hand out Borzoi puppies to be suckled by peasant women!! To the good fortune of mankind, such examples are few, but to our shame they exist.—*Comment by A. Bestuzhev.*

The nobility was also discontent with the poor market for its products [agricultural produce.—*Comp.*], by the cost of luxuries and the slowness of legal proceedings.

This nobility is divided into three parts: the enlightened, of whom the majority are aristocrats; the literate, who either torment the others as judges or are themselves involved in lawsuits; and finally the ignorant, who live in the villages, serve as parish elders or are already retired. Of these, it is the local gentry that constitute the ulcer of Russia; always guilty and always grumbling, desirous of living not according to their income but according to their own pretensions, they torment their poor peasants mercilessly. Some squander their resources on hunting, others on peasant theatres, on living in the capital or on lawsuits. The largest part of the better nobility, occupied in military service or in one of the two capitals demanding luxuries, entrusts the management of its estates to stewards, who rob the peasants and cheat their masters, and thus 9/10 of the estates in Russia are in disorder or mortgaged. The village clergy is in a pitiable condition. Not provided with stipends, the priests are wholly dependent on the generosity of the peasants and therefore obliged to comply with their wishes, and have themselves fallen into those vices they exist to eliminate.

The soldiers complained about exhaustion from their training, about having to clean their equipment and about guard duty; the officers complained about low pay and excessive discipline; the sailors complained about tedious duties; the naval officers about having nothing to do. Talented people complained that their road to promotion was blocked by those who demanded nothing except silent obedience; scholars complained that they were prevented from teaching, and young people complained that they were prevented from learning. In short, all around one could see discontented faces, there were whispers everywhere—everyone was asking where it would all lead to. Every element was in ferment. Only the government slept, unconcerned, on top of the volcano, and only the courts enjoyed felicity, as only for them was Russia the promised land. Their extortions reached unprecedented heights of shamelessness. Petty officials bought horses, clerks bought villages, and only the increased cost of bribes distinguished higher positions, so that in the capital, under the eyes of its protectors, the law became the object of open barter. In a word,

in the offices of state, in the courts, in the commissariats [institutions responsible for supplying the army.—*Comp.*], in the offices of governors and governor-generals,[4] everywhere where vested interest raised its head, those who could, plundered, and those who did not dare to plunder, stole. Everywhere, honest people suffered while the informers and the swindlers rejoiced.

You, Your Majesty, already know how, infuriated by the position in which Russia found itself, and seeing every element ready for a change, we decided to carry out a coup...

Here are our dreams for the future. We thought of instituting a Senate composed of the oldest and wisest heads in the country, into which we hoped to attract all the important people of the present government... The Chamber of Representatives was to be elected by the people of all the classes. As it is indisputable that public opinion cannot be established or given effect without linking it to the interest of each, we intended to base the impartiality of judges on this principle ... the parties to the case would have chosen the judge they wished from among a certain number of judges, so that the honour and advantage of each would have obliged them to be more honest with respect to each other, while the open nature of court proceedings, the limitation on the length of proceedings, and freedom of publication would have exposed the dishonest and the insincere. To ensure the enlightenment of the lower classes we wished to introduce everywhere Lancaster schools.[5] And in order to correct their morals—to raise the level of the white clergy[6] by providing parish priests and their families with an income. The liberation from virtually all forms of labour service, the abolition of the monopoly on wine distillation[7] and the improvement, using state resources, of the roads linking regions well and poorly supplied with food, the encouragement of agriculture and of industry in general would have secured the prosperity of the peasants. The introduction of consistent laws would have attracted to Russia a large number of foreign producers. Factories would have multiplied with the increased demand for artificial products [manufactured goods.—*Comp.*], and competition would have ensured their improvement, which progresses together with the prosperity of the people...

As regards foreign policy, this would have been based on acting openly, living in peace with all, not interfer-

ing in the affairs of others and not permitting others to interfere in our affairs, not listening to rumours and not fearing threats, for Russia is independent and can provide for herself in the event of a rupture, without assistance from others. She is a world in herself; moreover, the trading interests of other nations would have ensured that she never went without..."

"THE DESIRE TO BE OF USE TO THE FATHERLAND HAS ALWAYS PREOCCUPIED ME."

From the Testimony of Pyotr Borisov to the Committee of Enquiry[1]

Pyotr Borisov (1800-1854), a second lieutenant in an artillary brigade, was born into a family belonging to the local gentry. In his own words, "I was in love with democracy from my infancy", and as a child began to feel "a love for freedom and popular power". He was a passionate opponent of serfdom. In 1818, together with his elder brother, Andrei Borisov (1798-1854), he founded a secret circle whose aim was the moral improvement of its members. In 1823 the Society of Associated Slavs was formed on the basis of this circle, and it proclaimed its aim to be the creation of a democratic republican federation of the Slav countries. Pyotr and his brother were condemned to death, but the sentence was then commuted to penal servitude in perpetuity.

...No one instilled in me free-thinking and liberal ideas. In my childhood I read Greek and Roman history and the biographies written by such great men as Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos,[2] and these filled me with a love for freedom and democracy; later the brutality of the commanding officers to their subordinates fed this love and increased it by the hour. In 1819, not long before the company in which I was serving left for a campaign in Georgia, the commanding officer of that company, on the orders of the artillery commander of the corps, punished a former sergeant-major, a feuerwerker[3] and a private for drunkenness and squandering company funds by having them stripped to the waist and beaten in front of the assembled company.[4] I was so moved that I stepped forward and swore to abolish such punishments, even if it were to cost me my life. The injustice, brutality and oppression of the land-

owners towards their peasants always aroused in me similar feelings and confirmed me in my liberal ideas. This was further assisted by those displeasures and disappointments which I myself experienced. I loved to read and reflect, and I wished to examine and prove to myself the truth of any new idea before accepting it, but, blinded by my love of democracy and freedom, I found any liberal idea to be just and could find no way to refute it. I chose to read only the works of those writers whose thoughts and spirit were similar to mine; thus I imperceptibly became a liberal.

The desire to be of use to the Fatherland has always preoccupied me: I made it my rule to seek the truth and thought that, in educating myself in the opinions which have destroyed me, I was seeking and would find it. The common weal is the supreme law, that is, the maxim which was the basis of both my religion and my morality...

"WHERE AND WHEN WERE NATIONS HAPPY UNDER ABSOLUTE RULE, WITHOUT THE LAW, WITHOUT RIGHTS, WITHOUT PROPERTY?"

A Letter Written by Pyotr Kakhovsky in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress to Emperor Nicholas I[1]

Pyotr Kakhovsky (1797-1826), a retired lieutenant, was one of the most active and resolute members of the Northern Society. On the day of the insurrection on Senate Square, he mortally wounded Miloradovich, the Governor-General of St Petersburg, who was "persuading" the insurgent troops to lay down their arms. During the investigations Kakhovsky, held in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress, wrote several letters to the tsar criticising the internal situation in Russia. On 13 July 1826, in accordance with the sentence of the Supreme Criminal Court, he was hanged.

Most Merciful Sire,

My fate is decided, and I submit without a murmur, whatever the sentence pronounced against me. To live or to die are, for me, one and the same. None of us are immortal on this earth; on the throne or in chains, death takes its victims. A man with an elevated soul lives not for luxury but for ideas—no one is able to remove them!—and I, sentenced to penal servitude, lose very little; if there is any distress, it is only that of sep-

aration from those dear to my heart.

Sire! it is not of myself that I wish to speak, but of my homeland which, while my heart still beats, will be dearer to me than all the blessings of the world and of heaven itself. I wish to speak of your own benefit, of the benefit of mankind...

...What was the reason for our conspiracy? Ask yourself—what, if not the misery of our native land. Gracious Sire! I have seen the tears of compassion in your eyes. You are a man, you will understand me! May one permit a man like the rest of us to determine as he wishes the fate of fifty million people? Where, show me the country, reveal the history—where and when were nations happy under absolute rule, without the law, without rights, without property? Oh, Sire, malefactors are they, malefactors to you and to us, who degrade humanity before your eyes or accuse the people before one individual. Oppressing others, they reduce the pressure on themselves, it is a light burden: they lean on the people. Think, Sire—if you were to be no more, would there be many among those who now surround you who would sincerely grieve over your passing? Those accustomed to seek only their own advantage soon forget both the benefactors and the boons. Look at the changes in government, and you will agree with me. He whose heart is not wholly dedicated to the well-being of his country is incapable of loving anyone or anything save his own interest.

Absolute rulers do much good, in particular, the late emperor distributed much money, many titles and ranks; but is it of this that the general good is composed? The last crumb of bread is taken from one hundred people in order to throw it into the maw of the insatiable. No, Sire! benevolence must be practised not towards particular individuals, but towards the whole people, and government will be happy, peaceful and untroubled. Look at the condition of the people in our country! The safety of persons and property wholly without protection, a total absence of law and justice in the courts, oppressive taxes levied not on gain, but destroying capital, damage to trade, repressed enlightenment, stifled freedom—that is our wealth, our inheritance. Sire! imagine yourself a private individual in the state and ask yourself: what would you have done in our place when a man like yourself may dispose of you as he wishes, as a thing?

Emperor Alexander inflicted many disasters upon us, and he himself is the cause of the insurrection on 14 December. Was it not he who fanned the light of freedom in our hearts, and was it not he who then so cruelly extinguished it not only in our own country, but in the whole of Europe? He helped Ferdinand suppress the legitimate rights of the people of Spain[2] and did not foresee the evil that this caused to all thrones. Thereafter Europe cried out with one voice: there can be no agreement with kings! Sire! I hand myself over to you: has the people ever deceived the kings, and has it not ever been deceived by them? In the war against Napoleon what did the kings not promise, and which of them has fulfilled one of those promises?

Forgive me, Your Majesty, if I speak with complete frankness: sincerity is my zeal towards you. You were a grand prince and we could not judge you other than by appearances: your visible occupations were the army, soldiers, and we feared we would have a colonel on the throne. You must believe that it is not soldiers that are the strength and support of thrones, and those are deceived who think that one can protect oneself with bayonets. No, Gracious Sire! for God's sake, for the sake of humanity, for your own sake, protect yourself and the country with the law. Before you is a noble calling! Give rights and do not violate them; install legality, open up trade, do not exhaust fruitlessly the sources of national wealth, patronise true enlightenment, and you will make yourself the friend and benefactor of a well-wishing people. Who can think that our people is not endowed with all the abilities possessed by other nations? A state enlightened for several centuries by the Christian religion, having relations with foreign peoples as with its brothers, cannot be in a state of ignorance. Those also are mistaken who suppose that the altar is the support of your throne. December 14 has shown the opposite. No, the Christian religion itself teaches us the rights of people; natural law is not alien to it, but contained within it. Sire, you alone can, not only in our own country but in Europe, change the system of government, save thrones and bring equal benefit to kings and peoples...

Gracious Sire! Take in charge the internal organisation of the state; the absence of law is a pernicious evil for us, an evil both physical and moral. Service is replaced by servility, the general good is forgotten, self-seeking eats into the heart, and love of one's country has already,

for some, become a sentiment to be ridiculed.

Forgive me, Magnanimous Sire! that I, a criminal, still venture to request your clemency. Caught up by my feelings, I discovered the Secret Society [i.e. learned of the existence of the Secret Society and became a member.—*Comp.*], not thinking according to reason, but according to the movements of a heart grateful to you, and perhaps said that which other members of the Society would not have discovered. I am guilty before you, before the Society, before those unfortunates whom I involved in it. It is easy to destroy oneself, but to be the cause of the destruction of others is an unbearable torture. I, tormented, fall at your feet and beg you, Sire, to save the unfortunate! Freedom is seductive; I, enflamed by it, drew in officers from the Royal Grenadier Regiment... All these people have families, fathers, mothers, and I have become their murderer. Sire, you yourself are a father, you are a man. I am a dreadful malefactor who is the cause of it all; let all their sufferings end with me, and they, filled with gratitude, may be of service to you and their country and make amends for their folly. Spare them, Gracious Sire! I will die blessing the mercy of Your Imperial Majesty.

Perhaps my language is improper, Sire, and impertinent the action of he who makes so bold as to write to Your Majesty. Forgive me for that; I was not born into the court, and followed the movement of the heart.

Your Imperial Majesty's loyal subject,

Pyotr Kakhovsky.

1826, the 19th day of March

"CAN I SEE THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE, OF MY FELLOW CITIZENS?"

Vladimir Rayevsky. From "Reflections on the Slavery of the Peasants"[1]

Vladimir Rayevsky (1795-1872) was a major, a member of the Union of Welfare and the Southern Society, and the leader of the Kishinev department of these societies. In 1822 he was arrested and imprisoned for conducting anti-government propaganda among his soldiers. The judicial investigation into his case lasted for five years. In 1827 Rayevsky was sent into exile for life.

...There can be no equality in the world, for physical and moral qualities are the essential cause; but who gave one man the right to label another man his own property? By what right can the body, the property, and even the soul of one man belong to another? Whence the law permitting a man to trade in, exchange, gamble with, give away or tyrannise over other men like himself? Is not the source to be found in crude and unrestrained ignorance, malevolent egoism, animal passions and inhumanity?

On looking at a Russian landowner, I always picture him as reared by the tears, blood and sweat of those subjected to him, the atmosphere he breathes as composed of the sighs of those unfortunates, and his essence as selfishness and callousness... The oppression [of the serfs.—*Comp.*] has brought them to despairing inertia—the example of ignorant or corrupted aristocrats has worked upon their feelings to the same end. Drunkenness and, what is yet more harmful, those very laws which the nobility themselves implement, are a very weak defence against violence: of the safety, house, property, wives, daughters and the very lives of the poor and wretched peasants against their owners. Catherine II[2] abolished the word slavery on paper, why then not abolish it in reality?

In Greece, the Areopagus[3] condemned to death a child who had gouged out the eyes of a bird. I can quote more than a thousand examples of the malevolence of landowners going beyond the bounds of belief. The very thought causes one to shudder at the rules and arbitrariness of our pampered patricians! How many criminal acts without consequence, and decisions hidden in archives with respect to crimes committed by members of the nobility against the peasantry! I will set forth in brief the causes that will soon lead to the liberation of the villagers and a change in the manner of government.

1. However powerful the laws to protect the weak, unfortunate villager, while he is subject to his owner, he remains in servile humiliation, and the degradation of his position renders him dumb. It is not the man who matures to feeedom, but freedom which makes him a man and develops his abilities.

2. The sale of children from their fathers, fathers from their children, and the sale of people in general, is a business the dreadful and vile foundation of which requires no proof; from these come the callousness

and brutishness of the serfs.

Can a son respect his father when, taken from him while still in his cradle, he is accustomed to see hanging over him an omnipotent force, and his own fate depending solely on the landowner? How often a son, on the order of the landowner, must beat his own oppressed father with sticks or whips! At the mere thought of this, the sensitive heart demands quick action and the elimination of abuse!...

3. The despicable and infamous institution of harems has, for some time now, become a custom among base Russian nobles. The peasant, uncertain in his ownership of the property he has acquired, is equally uncertain in his possession of his wife and young daughters. His only possession, his family, often makes of him a victim of persecution. The physical beauty of his wife requires that he be conscripted into the army, the beauty of his daughters robs him of domestic comfort, as the support of his old age is forcibly removed from him. In Kursk or Voronezh gubernias how often an old and grey-haired man labours in sweat and blood without repose so that his adulterous master will have the means to buy a fine dress for his mistress, the old man's daughter! Here begins the corruption of morals, each landowning family is a babel of gossip and internal dissensions. And the benefit to the nobility? In truth, there is none!

4. However powerful might be the laws to protect the peasants, and however the government might direct its attention and patronage to their well-being, the court proceedings, reposing solely in the hands of the aristocracy, will always be used by it to defend its own and to oppress the weakest according to natural propensity. Can the peasant, having no voice and unable to report on, complain about or be a witness against his own landowner, mature to freedom? No! His oppression leads him into despairing inertia and indifference to his own, regardless of the poverty of his family...

7. Can the tiller of the field, through compulsion, achieve perfection in the arts of agriculture, and in particular when all his property belongs to the lord? And if the landowner teaches some of his serfs to read and write, is it for any other reason than to have the use thereof, as a riding master training a horse.

Aristotle[4] could not believe that any virtue was intrinsic to a slave, and he was quite correct.

Do not the reasons here set forth require the call for universal and rapid change? The well-being of the nation does not reside in the well-being of a few hundred people. The past period of time and wrong principles, weakening all the mechanisms in the machine of state, have clearly prepared their demise, and the scattered seeds of evil and corruption, having put down deep roots, now offer the most poisonous fruit.

No, not love of glory alone calls me to an active life! Love is a fleeting passion which brings regret. But patriotism, that lamp of civic life, that mysterious power which serves to guide me. Can I see the enslavement of the people, of my fellow-citizens, the pitiful vestments of the sons of the fatherland, the universal murmuring, fear and tears of the weak, the noisy discontent and embitterment of the strong—and not suffer with them?...

"I DECIDED TO SEEK THE CAUSE OF THE MISFORTUNES OF MY COMPATRIOTS AND, HAVING FOUND IT, TO DESTROY IT, EVEN IF THIS COST ME MY LIFE."

Yakov Andreyevich on the Reasons Why He Joined the Secret Society. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry[1]

Yakov Andreyevich (1800-1841), a second lieutenant in the artillery, was born into the non-landowning nobility. A member of the Society of Associated Slavs, he was one of its most active members. He conducted propaganda among his soldiers, preparing them for an armed uprising, and volunteered to assassinate the tsar. His apartment served as a meeting place for the Secret Society. The Supreme Criminal Court sentenced him to death, which was then commuted to penal servitude for life.

...Love for my native land, and for freedom as the condition proper to man, pity for my fellow-men who found themselves in such cruel misfortune through nothing other than the negligence of the government to which the people had entrusted itself, finally, the attitude of my colleagues, whom I loved, obliged me to join this Society...

I frequently had meetings with others serving in my brigade. Repeatedly witnesses to the unbridled and in-

human behaviour of our commanding officers towards the wretched soldiers, we had conversations about our military department and our government, which, we believed, are the cause of the degradation of the soldiers to this miserable level though they are the entire support of the state. Such conversations at our meetings were each day renewed by fresh illustrations of the plunder perpetrated against those citizens who feed the entire state by their labours. These sights, appearing daily before my eyes, gradually brought me to hate those who were the cause of such injustices, and finally to embitterment against the government. I muttered against God and the tsar, and in this embitterment sought to examine the source of all the fury with which my compatriots are tormented... Here is the cause, quite obvious, which stirred me to seek out people who could hear the crying of the miserable inhabitants and the groans of the wretched soldiers who fought so well and courageously in the campaign of 1812, when our homeland was enslaved by the enemy. Tell me, of what are those warriors worthy, who saved the capital and the country from the marauding enemy who trampled on the sacred? They swore allegiance to the throne and to their country, and resolutely kept their oath, and did they receive the same in return for their courage? No, thereafter the oppression increased still more.

The sobs of wives, the cries of children, the tears of the widows of soldier-husbands, forgotten orphans, the constant procession of beggars, blind and cripples, the desolation of peasant villages—is not this proof that the homeland is forgotten?...

I do not know why Russia is termed blessed when the people and the troops are soaked in tears, and through their ignorance mutter against God, and are in such confusion that they ascribe all their miseries to their Maker who created them, but who is the cause? I am saying this because, talking with them and enjoying their confidence, I learned of their hidden feelings.

Now tell me, was it possible, seeing every day the indignation and murmuring of these wretched pillars of our native land, not to feel for their situation if one is a man filled with a love for humanity and who is willing to sacrifice his own life to redeem this unhappy people? And how could one not resolve to do so, when, through its ignorance, the people ascribed all the miseries that afflicted them to the Supreme Being.

These are all my feelings, in which I make confession of my soul, of what it sought and what occupied it. I cannot vindicate myself against my own feelings, my sincere explanation can only win for me a just assessment by the judges. I willingly hand myself over to the rigour of the law. For me personally there is no happiness, but in the happiness of the people I would be happy...

Anyone can see my guilt—that in wishing the good of my country, seeing it oppressed by injustices, I was determined upon anything, I decided to seek the cause of the misfortunes of my compatriots and, having found it, to destroy it, even if this cost me my life.

"THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM ... BLEW EVEN OVER AUTOCRATIC RUSSIA."

Mikhail Fonvizin. "On the Causes of the Emergence of Secret Societies in Russia"

Mikhail Fonvizin (1788-1854), a retired general, had taken part in the war of 1812 and the foreign campaigns of the Russian army in 1813 and 1814. He was a well-known Decembrist, a member of the Union of Welfare, and the leader of its Moscow branch. The Supreme Criminal Court sentenced Fonvizin to 15 years penal servitude, to be followed by exile for life in Siberia. In 1853, following appeals by his younger brother, Ivan Fonvizin (also a member of the Decembrist movement), he returned home. He died on his brother's estate in the village of Maryino, outside Moscow. Fonvizin left behind a great deal of written material. His tract "A Review of the Manifestations of Political Life in Russia", from which an extract is reproduced below, was intended to provide a summary of the basic trends and events in political life in Russia at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. In the extract here quoted, Fonvizin discusses the causes of the emergence of secret societies.[1]

..Following the overthrow of Napoleon,[2] the main object of all the political actions of Emperor Alexander was to suppress the spirit of freedom which had arisen everywhere, and to strengthen the monarchical principles threatened by the secret societies. All the governmental and diplomatic activities of Alexander, beginning with the Holy Triple Alliance of Russia, Austria and Prussia, concluded in 1815, on 14 September, are evidence of this...

But the spirit of freedom, which in all the European states the governments, acting in concert, sought to sweep away by any means possible, blew even over autocratic Russia; the young generation which entered state service in the first ten years of the reign of Alexander and was brought up under the influence of the freedom-loving principles which he himself had proclaimed, fully realised to what extent Russia lagged behind Europe and true civilisation; however, loving and respecting Alexander, it calmly waited for him to undertake beneficient changes, prepared to co-operate assiduously.

The two unsuccessful wars against Napoleon[3] and the third, which in 1812 threatened the independence of Russia, obliged young Russian patriots to devote themselves entirely to military skills in defence of their homeland. The nobility, patriotically concerned about the decline in our military fame in the wars against France in 1805 and 1807, and anticipating imminent conflict, hastened to join the ranks of the army, prepared to meet Napoleon. All respectable and educated nobles ignored civil service for military service; young privy and state councillors gladly transferred to the army as lieutenant-colonels and majors on the eve of 1812. The extraordinary events of that year, the triumphal expulsion from Russia of the hitherto invincible Emperor of the French and the destruction of his innumerable hordes, the subsequent campaigns of 1813 and 1814 and the capture of Paris, in all of which our army took such an active part—notably elevated the spirit of our troops, and particularly the young officers...

In this mood, with a feeling of their own worthiness and exalted love for their homeland, the majority of the officers of the Guards and the General Staff returned to St Petersburg in 1815. In the campaigns in Germany and France our young people had been introduced to European civilisation, whose impact upon them was all the greater as they were able to compare all that they had seen abroad with what they saw at every step at home: the slavery and lack of rights of the majority of Russians, the brutal treatment meted out by superiors to their subordinates, every kind of abuse of power, the lawlessness that reigned everywhere—all this angered and stirred the indignation of educated Russians and their patriotic sentiments. During their campaigns, many of them had met German officers who were members of the Prussian secret society (Tugendbund)[4] which so successfully

prepared the uprising in Prussia and assisted in liberating it, and also with French liberals. In frank conversations with them our young people unconsciously absorbed their free manner of thinking and the desire for constitutional institutions, ashamed for Russia as a deeply decadent autocracy.

On returning to St Petersburg, could our liberals be satisfied with the banality of regimental life and the trivia of training, the details of drilling exercises rigorously required of them by superiors who thereby satisfied the inherent inclination of Alexander I and his brothers for military drill, parades, individual training and the like, despite the fact that the experience of the harsh two-year war against the enemy should, it would seem, have convinced Alexander that victory did not depend on such trifles. Moreover, the Russians were offended by the clear preference which the emperor showed to all foreigners in general over and above his own subjects, his contempt for whom he did not trouble to conceal...

While intelligent Russian patriots could still expect from Alexander himself some beneficient changes which, by limiting his autocratic power, would have to some extent improved the position of the people, they were prepared to co-operate assiduously with his benevolent intentions. But when they became convinced that he had completely changed his former freedom-loving way of thinking after the war due to the pernicious influence of Metternich,[5] when they learned of his political actions at the congresses in Vienna, Aachen, Leibach and Verona,[6] at which Alexander and his allies revealed their hostile attitude to the freedom of peoples, then the most enthusiastic of his admirers during the brilliant period of the occupation of Paris cooled entirely towards him. However, at the end of the war, nothing so aroused the indignation of public opinion against Alexander, and not the liberals alone, but the whole of Russia, as the forcible creation of military settlements. Who was the first to inspire the emperor with this misbegotten idea? No one knows. Most probably, desirous of having leadership in Europe, he himself thought of it in order to increase his military might as much as he could with the least cost to the state...

Of all the actions taken by Emperor Alexander following the change in his thinking, the creation of military settlements was the most despotic and hated... The crea-

tion of military settlements, in which many millions were held without any benefit, was the object of universal disapproval. Even those whom Alexander entrusted with carrying through this measure were, at least according to their assurances, acting against their own conviction and only to please him. The chief director of the military settlements, Count Arakcheyev—hated by the whole of Russia for his spiteful and vicious morals, but beloved of Alexander as a devoted slave ready to sell his soul to please him—even Arakcheyev said that it was not he who had thought of the military settlements, that he himself, while not approving of the measure, was carrying it through as the sacred will of his monarch and benefactor... The military settlements delivered the last blow to Alexander's popularity.

"OH, RUSSIA!... YOU ARE THE ONLY DIVINITY I ACKNOWLEDGE AND THAT I CARRY IN MY HEART."

Nikolai Turgenev. From Diary Notes, 1816-1820[1]

Nikolai Turgenev (1789-1871) was one of the founders of the Union of Welfare and a prominent member of the Decembrist movement. In 1820, at a conference of the Secret Society in St Petersburg, he called for the creation of a republic in Russia. Between 1821 and 1824 he was a member of the Supreme Duma (governing body) of the Northern Society. In April 1824 he went abroad for medical treatment. During the Decembrist insurrection, the enquiry and the trial he was abroad and was sentenced in his absence. The sentence of the court was as follows: "his crimes: he was an active member of the Secret Society, took part in its institution, reorganisation, meetings and extension by involving others, also took part in the plan to introduce republican government and, having removed himself abroad, he did not respond to the government summons to appear to defend himself, thereby confirming the testimony against him". The court sentenced Turgenev to death by beheading, commuted to penal servitude for life. Nikolai Turgenev continued to live in exile until his death in 1871 (in 1857 and 1861 he visited Russia). In 1847 he published in Brussels a three-volume work entitled *Russia and the Russians*, in which he gave a detailed description of the contemporary situation in Russia and the activity of the Decembrist secret societies.

The diary notes by Turgenev for the years 1816-1820, quoted below, give us a concrete picture of how he lived, what he thought, and how a member of the Decembrist Secret Society reacted to the events of his day.

Farewell, old 1816! Greetings, new 1817! In melan-

choly and solitude, the same hopes are your herald and will accompany each of your successors, if my life will count them. From now onwards the same hopes will inspire me: may the new year bring Russia new happiness, and the Russian people—new well-being! May the homeland have new life, joy and freedom! May the number of her true sons increase, and may the number of the blind and selfish decrease! The disposition of my soul pledges the sincerity of these hopes. Many, perhaps, greet the new year with joy and joyfull recollections; I can only meet it with tears. May those tears be numbered among the tears that will be shed by the wretched in the course of this year! And then my tears will be tears of joy!...

28 June [1817].

Convinced of the necessity of secret societies, it is proper to point out in particular that those which are organised according to the rules of morality and patriotism deserve not persecution but approval by governments, all the more so as governments are often unable to translate into reality that which societies may. The aim of a society can always be set forth more clearly than the aim of a government. A society can also win more trust from people than a government for the reason that the government, having more power than any society, is unable to inspire this confidence; the law of the strong is not the same as a law agreed upon. A society is composed of private individuals, and consequently is comprised within the sphere of private action. A government, on the other hand, has no rivals in its activity. Power destroys trust...

29 June [1817].

Any beginning is difficult—a simple yet great truth. Those who are beginning still, today, face great difficulties, and all the more so as opinions may differ as to the means—means which, by their importance, sometimes become the aim. But should these difficulties make us afraid? Should we not undertake the beginning simply because we may not see the end? No! What we are undertaking must be, sooner or later, begun and completed. What will be said by those who will undertake the same cause when they discover that they have nowhere any predecessors? What will our grandsons say about their grandfathers, famed for many things,—when they cannot find one significant flower in their wreath of glory? Our forbears, they will say, displayed their valour for

the honour and resounding glory of the fatherland, but where are their deeds on behalf of the civic happiness of that fatherland? Is it possible that a nation that has given birth to so many heroes, that has revealed such brilliance of intellect, character and goodness, so much patriotism—could not contain within it people who, having chosen as their part to act for the benefit of their compatriots, consistently pursued this calling; who, undaunted by those obstacles which act so powerfully upon those lacking character, but burning with the fire of patriotism in their noble souls—would themselves seek, and draw the best people of their day towards the sacred, albeit far-off aim of civic happiness? What heart would not tremble at such reproaches? What paradoxes can refute them?

Men have long sought the purpose of their existence and will continue to seek it. But the time will finally come—if, incidentally, one may hope for the perfection of man—the time will come when people will understand their true purpose, and will find it in love for their homeland, in the desire for its well-being, in the sacrifice of themselves and everything for its benefit. This feeling of love is innate in every man. It is the spark of divinity; its action alone enraptures us and elevates our soul. In what have people not placed their happiness? With what have they not sought to satisfy their souls' yearning for the unknown? Their efforts have always been in vain if they did not have the homeland as their object. But the thought of the homeland always sweetened their sacrifices, satisfied the aspirations of the heart, brought them closer to perfection—that perfection possible for man.

29 September [1817].

On the third day "Arzamas"[2] members came to see us. Our conversation moved unwittingly from literature to domestic policy. Everyone was agreed on the need to destroy slavery [peasant serfdom.—*Comp.*], but the measures used do not please all. I also wish that it might be done otherwise; but as we have no choice, we have to accept what we are given. All intelligent people must support the government in this good cause and intention, in word and in deed. The aim is noble; the means must be as far as possible such as will not cause injury. Support not for the government, but for the thing itself. I, who do not like to praise anyone without cause, and even less a government, will always commend the desire to eradicate

slavery if, however, that desire is put into action.

20 October [1817].

I am oppressed, crushed by the thought that I will not, in my lifetime, see Russia free and governed by a wise constitution. Whatever the good intention, my hands, so to speak, fall useless at my sides when I recall that I am condemned to spend the second half of my allotted time in that order of things that has existed hitherto. That is sad, tragic, dreadful, humiliating!

3 March [1818].

Slavery will always have defenders, at least while it remains advantageous, profitable for those who themselves do not share in this miserable fate. The defenders [of slavery.—*Comp.*] say, moreover, that time cures all. Time, of course, cures many things, but it is worth remembering that the changes wrought by time are often accompanied by great and undeserved miseries, by great injustices. Moreover we also see that time does not alter the fate of the serfs; on the contrary, it sometimes makes their condition worse. Let it be remembered that luxury and waste have increased, and that the landowners desire to spend more than before...

7 August [1818].

I now loathe more than ever before the baseness of slavery, having seen closely how it degrades people, how it can exist. All the arguments used to defend and excuse slavery are empty folly... One can become accustomed to anything, but I will never become accustomed to seeing slaves...

11 September [1818].

...Our village, the fate of the peasants and the tragic, dreadful position of Russia are constantly in my mind... We live under it [despotism.—*Comp.*], and will do so for a long time! That also oppresses me...

19 June [1819].

...I end each evening with a certain depression. In the morning I am busy in the office, until the evening I spend the time in the club: I am wholly occupied by the one and the other. In the evening I sit by the window and in every object, in every moving automaton I see the misery of my homeland. The peasant menfolk working with enormous labour... the soldiers, poor and exhausted after parades and training, working for their scanty daily bread; the cries of the sentinels, reminiscent of the dreadful position of those who cry and the inaccessibility of those who command... Some universal depression

weighs upon St Petersburg at this time...

Is it possible that, until the end of my life, I will pass the winter and summer evenings as I have until now? Is it possible that the echoes of patriotism will not reverberate throughout the expanses of vast Russia? Is it possible that I will see, as I take my last breath, baseness and egotism as the sole deities of the north? Is it possible that this glorious, intelligent, good nation will never rise to its true dignity?

31 December [1819].

Wednesday, 11 o'clock at night. I must meet the new year. Whether I meet it or no, it will come. I would greet this new year with all my heart if only it brought with it the hope of better times for my homeland. And it too will pass without the trace of true life...

...And so, with thoughts of you, oh, Russia, my dear and unhappy homeland! I see out the old and welcome in the new year. You are the only divinity I acknowledge and that I carry in my heart—you alone can stir powerful feelings in my heart! What are men? Where are they? I do not know them. I know only your sons! But where are your sons? Where are they to be sought amidst triumphant vice and oppressed virtue?

The baseness of all I must behold can inspire in me no powerful feeling other than powerful hatred, powerful contempt. But love for my homeland overcasts within me all other feelings; and if I could behold its happiness, how soon would the feelings of hatred and contempt disappear from my heart!...

24 March [1820].

Yesterday I learned that the Spanish king has proclaimed the constitution of the Cortes.[3] All honour to you, army of Spain! All glory to the Spanish people! For the second time[4] Spain is proving what the popular spirit means, what love of the homeland means. The present insurgents conducted themselves with great nobility. They told the people that they wanted a constitution, without which Spain cannot enjoy well-being; they declared that their enterprise might not succeed, they might die, all victims of their love for their homeland, but that the memory of this enterprise, the memory of the constitution, of freedom, would live on, would remain in the heart of the Spanish people...

"IF THERE WERE TO BE A SECRET SOCIETY, THE MEMBERS OF WHICH WOULD ASSUME THE OBLIGATION TO WORK WITH ALL THEIR STRENGTH FOR THE BENEFIT OF RUSSIA, I WOULD WILLINGLY JOIN SUCH A SOCIETY."

From the "Notes" of Ivan Yakushkin[1]

Ivan Yakushkin (1793-1857), a retired captain, was the son of a poor nobleman from Smolensk and a man with a high sense of honour. He was one of the first who, in 1817, volunteered to assassinate the tsar. He was among the founders and active members of the Union of Salvation and the Union of Welfare. When, in December 1825, Yakushkin was arrested and taken for questioning directly to Nicholas I himself, he "displayed obstinacy" in his statements. The furious tsar ordered that Yakushkin be "fastened in hand and leg irons and be held as a malefactor". Death—such was the sentence of the court on Yakushkin. This sentence was commuted to 20 years penal servitude and exile for life.

The war of 1812 roused the people of Russia to life, and constitutes an important period in its political existence. All the orders and efforts of the government would have been insufficient to expel the invading Gauls and scores of others who had invaded Russia if the people had remained in its previous torpor. It was not on orders from above that the inhabitants withdrew to the forests and marshes on the approach of the French, leaving their homes to be burned. It was not on orders from above that the population of Moscow marched forth, together with the army, out of the ancient capital. Along the Ryazan highway, to the right and the left, the fields were covered with a motley crowd, and I can still remember the words of a soldier walking beside me: "Well, thank God, the whole of Russia has marched out!" In the ranks, even among the soldiers, there were no senseless tools; each felt that he was called to take part in a great cause...

The fact of spending a whole year in Germany, and then several months in Paris, could not but change, if only a little, the views of thinking young Russians...

In 1814 we returned by sea from France to Russia. The 1st Guards Division disembarked in Oranienbaum* and heard the prayers of thanksgiving... During the ser-

* Now the city of Lomonosov on the Baltic coast.

vice the police mercilessly beat the people, who were attempting to approach the troops. That was our first unpleasant impression on returning to our homeland. I was given permission to leave for St Petersburg and await my regiment there. I stayed with a former fellow-student, Tolstoy (now a senator), and we set off together to look at the 1st Guards Division as it marched into the capital. In order to mark this great day, gates had been hastily erected at the Petergoff city entrance, and on them had been mounted six alabaster horses to symbolise the six Guards regiments of the 1st Division. Tolstoy and myself stood not far away from the golden carriage in which the empress was sitting with the Grand Duchess Anna. Finally the emperor appeared at the head of the Guards division, riding a magnificent chestnut horse and with a drawn sword which he was about to lower before the empress. We gazed at him with admiration; but at that very moment a man ran across the street immediately in front of his horse. The emperor dug his spurs into the horse and charged after the running man with his sword unsheathed. The police struck at the man with truncheons and captured him. We could not believe our eyes and turned away, ashamed for our beloved emperor. That was my first disillusionment in his regard; I could not but recall the cat turned into a fair maiden, but which could not see a mouse without chasing it.

In 1814 the life of young people in St Petersburg was suffocating. For two years we had had great events before our eyes that had decided the fate of nations, and had taken some part in them; now it was intolerable to behold the empty life of St Petersburg and listen to the chatter of old men who praised all that was old and censured any movement forward. We were a hundred years ahead of them. In 1815, when Napoleon escaped from the island of Elba and invaded France, the Guards were ordered to march, and we rejoiced as if at an unexpected happiness...

That same year we returned to St Petersburg. A club had formed in the Semyonovsky Regiment: 15 or 20 officers had come together in order to have the opportunity to dine with each other each day; not only those who contributed to the club dined together, but also all those whose duties obliged them to spend the entire day in the regiment. After dinner some played chess, others read aloud foreign newspapers and followed events in Europe—such a way of passing the time

was undoubtedly novel...

The regimental commander of the Semyonovsky Regiment, General Potyomkin, patronised our club and sometimes dined with us; but a few months later Emperor Alexander ordered Potyomkin to close down the club in the Semyonovsky Regiment, saying that such a gathering greatly displeased him. However, the emperor was still loved, for everyone still remembered how magnificent he had been in 1813 and 1814, and therefore they waited impatiently for him in 1815...

On his return, the emperor asked the minister to be allowed a month's rest, and then transferred almost the entire government of the country to Count Arakcheyev. His spirit [Alexander I's.—*Comp.*] was in Europe; in Russia he concerned himself above all with increasing the number of troops. The tsar was always present at evening reviews; in every regiment training excercises began and constant drilling became the rule.

Military service with the Guards became intolerable for me. In 1816 there was talk of a possible war with the Turks, and I put in a request to be transferred to the 37th Regiment of the Chasseurs under the command of Colonel Fonvizin, whom I had met in 1813 and who was known in the army as a good officer. At that time Sergei Trubetskoy, Matvei and Sergei Muravyov and myself lived in the barracks and were often together with the three Muravyov brothers: Alexander, Mikhail and Nikolai. Nikita Muravyov was also often in our company. In our conversations, talk was usually about the situation in Russia. We examined the main ulcers of our homeland: the torpor of the people, serfdom, the brutality towards the soldiers, for whom 25 years of army service was almost penal servitude; the universal extortion, theft and, finally, the manifest lack of respect for man in general. That which was termed higher educated society was composed, for the most part, of Old Believers, for whom to touch upon any of the questions which interested us was a heinous crime. As for the landowners living on their estates, nothing more need be said.

Once Trubetskoy and myself were at the Muravyovs', Matvei and Sergei; we were joined by Alexander and Nikita Muravyov, who proposed that we set up a Secret Society...

I said... that if there were to be a Secret Society, the members of which would assume the obligation to work with all their strength for the benefit of Russia, then I

would willingly join such a Society. Matvei and Sergei Muravyov gave almost the same reply to Alexander's proposal... Thus the basis was laid for that Secret Society whose existence, perhaps, was not altogether fruitless for Russia.

It was decided to draw up statutes for the Society whose members should initially be admitted only with the agreement of all six of us. Shortly thereafter I left St Petersburg to join the 37th Regiment of the Chasseurs. En route I called to see my uncle, who was in charge of my small estate in Smolensk Gubernia, and I told him that I wanted to set free my peasants. At the time I had little idea how that was to be arranged, or what would come of it; however, deeply convinced that serfdom was base, I was filled with a sense of my direct obligation to free those people who depended on me. My uncle listened to my proposal without even showing surprise, but with something akin to sorrow; he was convinced I had gone mad...

At the end of 1817 the entire imperial family left for Moscow and spent 9 or 10 months there. In August a detached Guards Corps had already arrived in Moscow, composed of the first battalions of all infantry and the first squadrons of all cavalry regiments. The corps also had artillery. This corps was under the command of General Rozen, and the chief-of-staff was Alexander Muravyov. Nikita, Matvei and Sergei Muravyov also arrived with the corps; Mikhail Muravyov, who had already joined the Society, also arrived in Moscow. In my absence the Society had spread considerably. Many members had joined in St Petersburg, including Burtsov (later major-general, killed in the Caucasus), and Pestel, adjutants to Count Witgenstein. Pestel drew up the first statutes for our Secret Society. What was remarkable about those statutes was, first of all, that those who joined the Secret Society undertook the obligation not to leave state service under any circumstances, so that, with the passage of time, all important civilian and military posts would be at the disposal of the Secret Society; secondly, it was stated that if the reigning emperor did not give any rights of independence to the people, then under no circumstances was an oath of allegiance to be taken to his successor without limiting his autocracy.

When the Muravyovs, and in particular Mikhail, arrived in Moscow they found the statutes written in St Petersburg inconvenient for the initial activity of the Secret

Society. It was decided to draw up new statutes, with the printed German statutes brought back from abroad by Prince Ilya Dolgoruky serving as a model... While the statutes were being prepared for the future Union of Welfare, a temporary Secret Society was formed under the name of the Military Society. Its aim was solely the spread of the Society and the unification of like-minded people.

Many of the young people had such an excess of energy in their then pitiful situation that to see in front of them a direct and noble aim was considered bliss, and therefore it was not surprising that all decent young people who were then in Moscow either joined the Military Society or, being like-minded, sympathised with its members. Usually we met at Fonvizin's, with whom I was then staying, or at Alexander Muravyov's at Khamovniki,* in the house where General Rozen, the commander of the Guards Corps, was also staying. These meetings were attended by more and more people, and we discussed those subjects whose importance engaged us all.

To the former ills was added yet another evil for Russia: Emperor Alexander, who had long had the idea of military settlements, now set about creating them. Count Arakcheyev was made responsible for putting into effect the plans drawn up by the tsar himself for the organisation of these military settlements. Count Arakcheyev, who on every occasion boasted of the fact that he was merely the faithful instrument of the autocracy, was true to himself in this also. In Novgorod Gubernia the state peasants in three volosts (districts) designated as military settlements sensed, with typically Russian intuition, the disaster that was impending, and protested. Count Arakcheyev sent the cavalry and artillery against them; they were fired at, slain, many were made to run the gauntlet, and the poor people were compelled to submit. After which the peasants were told that their homes and all their possessions no longer belonged to them, that they were all to be conscripted into the army, and their children were to be Cantonists,[2] that they would have certain military duties to discharge, and that, in addition, they were to work the land, not each for himself but for the whole regiment to which they belonged. Their beards were immediately shaved off, they

* Khamovniki—one of the districts of old Moscow.

were put in military uniform and assigned to companies and platoons. The news of events in Novgorod filled everyone with horror. Emperor Alexander, in Europe the patron and almost the leading light of the liberals, was in Russia not only a harsh but, even worse, a senseless despot...

At the end of 1817 the whole of the imperial family was already in Moscow and awaiting the imminent arrival of the emperor. One day Alexander Muravyov called at a house in which I was dining but where he himself had no acquaintances, asked for me to be sent for and, with a rather mysterious air, said that I should call on him that evening. I arrived at the appointed time. There were not many people at the meeting; apart from the host himself there were Nikita, Matvei and Sergei Muravyov, Fonvizin, Prince Shakhovskoy and myself. Alexander Muravyov read out the letter he had just received from Trubetskoy, in which he informed us of the rumours circulating in St Petersburg; firstly, that the tsar was in love with Poland, and we knew that already: Poland, to which he had just granted a constitution and which he considered far more civilised than Russia, he saw as part of Europe; secondly, he hated Russia, and that was credible after his actions in Russia from 1815 onwards. Thirdly, that he was planning to transfer certain lands from Russia to Poland, and that was also believable; finally, to transfer his capital to Warsaw. That might have appeared beyond belief, but after all the unbelievable things wrought by the hand of the Russian tsar in Russia, it was possible to believe in this last rumour, particularly given our then inflamed imagination.

Alexander Muravyov read out the letter from Trubetskoy one more time, and then began the arguments and laments over the pitiful condition that Russia found itself in under the rule of Emperor Alexander. I began to shiver and walked up and down the room, asking those present if they indeed believed all the contents of Trubetskoy's letter, and that Russia could not be more unfortunate than to remain under the rule of the reigning emperor: everyone assured me at once as to the first and the second. In that case, I said, the Secret Society has nothing left to do, and now each of us must act according to his conscience and conviction. Everyone was silent for a moment. Finally Alexander Muravyov said that, in order to avert the disaster threatening Russia, it was essential to put an end to the reign of Emperor

Alexander, and that he proposed that we cast lots to determine which of us should strike the blow against the tsar. I replied that they were too late, that I had decided without the need for lots to sacrifice myself for this end, and that I would yield this to no one. There was another silence. Fonvizin came up to me and asked me to calm myself, saying that I was feverish and that in such a condition I could not take upon myself a pledge that on the morrow might appear folly. For my part I assured Fonvizin that I was perfectly calm, and in proof of that I suggested that we play a game of chess, which I won.

The meeting came to an end, and I and Fonvizin departed. He prevented me from sleeping almost the whole night, trying to dissuade me from my mad enterprise, and he said, with tears in his eyes, that he could not but imagine with horror the moment when I would be led to the scaffold. I assured him that I would not afford such a dreadful spectacle. I had decided, on the arrival of Emperor Alexander, to leave for the Cathedral of the Assumption with two pistols, to shoot the emperor with one, and myself with the other. In such an act I saw no murder, but a duel with the death of both participants.

The next day Fonvizin, seeing that all his efforts were in vain, left for Khamovniki, and told the members of the Society who lived there that I refused to abandon my planned undertaking. That evening the people who had gathered the previous evening at Alexander Muravyov's met at Fonvizin's; the talk that began was totally different from what had been said the evening before. I was assured that the contents of Trubetskoy's letter might prove not to be true, that the death of Emperor Alexander at the present moment could not be of any benefit to the state, and that, finally, with my obstinacy I would destroy not only all of them, but also the Secret Society at its birth, when it might, with time, be of so much use to Russia. All these arguments and discussions lasted almost the whole evening; finally I gave them my word not to carry out my design, and I told them that if everything they had so resolutely believed the previous evening was nothing but folly, then that previous evening they could, by their frivolity, have led me to commit the most heinous crime; but that if, indeed, nothing could be more fortunate for Russia than the end of the reign of Emperor Alexander, then today,

by their lack of resolution and their demands, they were depriving me of the opportunity to perform a great act, and in conclusion I said that I was no longer a member of their Secret Society.

Fonvizin, Nikita Muravyov and the others then earnestly sought to dissuade me from leaving the Society, but I insisted that I would not attend a single meeting. And indeed, each time they met at Fonvizin's, I departed, but nonetheless, being a close friend of the main members of the Society, I saw them every day. They spoke freely about their affairs in my presence, and I knew about all their activities.

"THEY VOWED TO EACH OTHER TO ASSIST THEIR MONARCH WORD AND DEED IN ALL HIS PLANS FOR THE BENEFIT OF HIS PEOPLE."

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Union of Salvation and the Union of Welfare. From the "Notes" of Trubetskoy[1]

Sergei Trubetskoy (1790-1860), a prince and a general at Main Headquarters, was the founder of the first Decembrist Secret Society, the Union of Salvation, and one of the leaders of the Northern Society. A few days before the insurrection on 14 December 1825, he was elected "dictator of the uprising". The Supreme Criminal Court sentenced him to death, which the tsar commuted to penal servitude for life.

At the end of the war of 1812, the name of Emperor Alexander resounded throughout the civilised world; peoples and monarchs, amazed at his magnanimity, placed their destiny in his hands. Russia was proud of him, and awaited a new life under his rule. He proclaimed in a Manifesto[2] his gratitude to his troops and every section of the Russian people, who had brought him to the heights of glory; he promised, having secured the calm of universal peace in Europe, to undertake the arrangement of the internal well-being of the vast state entrusted by providence to his rule.

Certain young people who had fought on the battlefield for their country and their tsar desired to be the faithful servants of their leader in peace-time. They vowed to each other to assist their monarch in word and deed in all his plans for the benefit of his people. They were few, but they were certain that their number would increase with each day, that others like themselves would

not wish to limit their glory to military exploits and would wish to prove their zeal and love for their homeland not only in the execution of the duties their service laid on them, but in devoting all their resources and abilities to the promotion of the common good in every form.

Those who joined the small society were required: 1st, to discharge their duties meticulously; 2nd, to conduct themselves honourably, nobly and irreproachably in their private life; 3rd, to support by word all the measures and proposals of the monarch for the common good; 4th, to give publicity to actions worthy of praise, and to condemn abuses of position and rank. The activity of the society was to be based on the consideration that many government figures and private individuals would protest against certain plans by the emperor (as was the case, for example, regarding the emancipation of the peasants), and therefore, however weak might be the voice of those who vindicated those measures, yet the unceasing repetition within society of conversation on a well-known topic, and its vindication, would convince many and give the government the strength to execute its good intent. First the young people were confined to talk alone between themselves. It was still not known what exactly the monarch intended to do, but in the conviction that he desired to secure the well-being of Russia it was decided to shape the Society and order its activity in such a way as to support and strengthen the proposals of the monarch. On 9 February 1816, Pestel, Nikita Muravyov, Sergei Shipov and Trubetskoy had laid the foundations of the Society. They were joined by Alexander Muravyov, Nikolai Novikov, Ilya Bibikov, Prince Ilya Dolgoruky, Fyodor Glinka, Sergei and Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, Prince Pavel Lopukhin and Yakushkin. Pestel, Dolgoruky and Trubetskoy were entrusted with writing the statutes for the Society. Trubetskoy busied himself with the rules for accepting members and for their activity within the Society; Dolgoruky concerned himself with the aim of the Society and the measures to achieve it; Pestel dealt with the ceremony of initiation and the internal organisation. He had a predilection for Masonic rituals and wanted to introduce similar ones for ceremonial occasions...

The Masonic rituals introduced for meetings and the initiation of members hampered the activity of the Society and introduced an element of the mysterious which was disliked by the majority of the members. They

wanted activity that was clear and open, though it was decided not to divulge the reasons for their gatherings in order not to arouse the hostility of those not well-disposed towards them. No general conferences were necessary, but only individual meetings to discuss topics which required that information about them be spread among the public. Therefore it was decided that the statutes shortly be changed in this respect as inconvenient in application. Shortly after the creation of the Society, Pestel had to leave for Mitava—the quarters of General Witgenstein, whose adjutant he was. In the course of 1817, a section of the Guards left for Moscow, whence the court was removing. The members, whose number was increasing at that time, were also scattered, and only a few remained in St Petersburg. In the meantime, Emperor Alexander had begun the implementation of two of his designs: 1st, a project had been drawn up for the emancipation of the Estlandic peasants,[3] and people began to say openly that he intended to emancipate the estate peasants; 2nd, another project, entrusted to Count Arakcheyev, was the creation of military settlements... The first project would definitely be opposed by almost all the landowners, and required tireless action by the members [of the Secret Society.—*Comp.*] in order to support it and guide general conviction in the need for this measure. It was necessary to show the landowners that sooner or later the peasants would be freed, that it would be far better if the landowners themselves were to free them, as then they could reach agreement with the peasants on advantageous conditions, that if the landowners continued to resist and refused to agree voluntarily, then the peasants might seize their own freedom, and then our country would be on the edge of the abyss. An uprising by the peasants would inevitably bring horrors which no imagination could depict, and the state would become the victim of dissensions, and could become the prey of the ambitious; finally, it might fall apart, and one powerful state would become numerous weak ones. All the glory and power of Russia might perish, if not forever, certainly for many centuries. The members of the Society were young people who did not yet have their own estates, and therefore they had only one means of action—verbal persuasion. The second project—the creation of military settlements for the whole army—was a matter whose later consequences could remain unperceived by the most clear-

sighted, the most experienced in state government...

...These fears were confirmed by the uprising which began in several settlements. The harsh measures used against the inhabitants of these peaceful settlements, who were to be turned into militarised villagers, provoked universal indignation. Count Arakcheyev and Witt,[4] who carried through this plan, were the object of general loathing, and the name of the emperor himself did not remain without reproach. It was difficult to believe that he could continue to be ignorant of the brutal actions of these two men, and that created an unfavourable opinion of his heart and disposition...

These actions on the part of the monarch did not seem, in the eyes of society, to correspond with that love of his people and desire to secure their well-being that had been ascribed to him... The members of the [Secret.—*Comp.*] Society, grieved by the actions of the monarch and deceived in their hopes, nonetheless could not abandon the belief that, by combining their efforts, they could do a great deal for the benefit of their homeland. The number of those prepared to help increased every day, and it remained to define clearly the plan of action and the principles on which it was to be based. The example of the Prussian Tugendbund showed that the efforts of people united by a common aim are not in vain. The spirit of mildness, love of homeland and good will which animated the members of the Society was to be expressed in all its actions; the most hostile investigation should not find in the statutes anything which could provide an excuse for accusing the members of ambition or an activity endangering the peace of the homeland. The majority of the members of the Society were in Moscow, and their number included almost all the founders. They elected four members who were entrusted with drawing up the statutes. These were: Mikhail Muravyov, Prince Pyotr Dolgoruky, Nikita Muravyov and Prince Trubetskoy. They carried out their task, and the new statutes won full approval and were adopted. The Society, in view of the substance of its aim, was called the Union of Welfare... The members were divided according to their occupations or service. Each was obliged, according to his station, to acquire knowledge that would make him a useful citizen, and information that was necessary for the activity of the Society, which itself remained faithful to its original purpose, that is, the support of all measures by the government from which

one could hope for consequences of benefit to the well-being of the state, and the condemnation of those which did not serve this purpose... The general activity of the members corresponded to these principles, and furthermore each of them pledged to free his peasants when they passed into his possession. The activity of the Society embraced, in its subject matter, all classes in the state and all aspects of government, and therefore it must define the sphere of activity for each member, for which purpose the members were divided into four groups according to their occupation. Each group was divided into councils, in which all the members operated according to their occupation... The council was directed by a chairman who presented the topics, and the members communicated information and reported on their activities. Each member could set up an auxiliary council. The purpose of the auxiliary councils was to prepare the members for the Society. All the councils were under the leadership of the Main Council, which was composed of twenty-four members. A chairman and a supervisor were elected within the Main Council...

"LE PRESIDENT SANS PHRASES"

From the Testimony of Pavel Pestel on the Union of Welfare[1]

All the members of the Union of Welfare were unanimously agreed in their intention to assist the introduction in Russia of a new state of affairs, and in their belief that this could not be brought about except by a quantitative increase in the membership of the Society, and thus the spread of the Union of Welfare into as many places as possible; but in all other topics and articles there was no common opinion and unity of intent and view. These differences of opinion concerned primarily the means by which change was to be effected in Russia, and the order of things and form of government that were to replace the present government.

On these two subjects nothing was finally and definitively proposed by the Society. There were only discussions and debates without conclusion; so it might be said that these two topics had still not come to fruition in the Society, although much was said and many plans and projects were formulated. It usually ended with the

need to continue to strengthen the Society, and only thereafter decide on the course of action according to the circumstances and the state of affairs within the Union...

At the beginning of 1820, a meeting of the Main Duma of the Union of Welfare was called here, in St Petersburg. Such was the name given to the assembly of all the founding members of the Union in St Petersburg. This Main Duma, according to the rules of the Green Book, constituted the legislative power of the Union...

At the opening of the meeting, which took place in the apartment of Colonel Glinka, Prince Dolgoruky proposed that the Duma request me to set forth all the advantages and disadvantages of monarchical and republican government so that each member could then express his arguments and point of view. This was done. Finally, after long discussions, the debate was ended and it was stated that the votes would be taken in such a way that each member would say what he wanted: a monarch or a president; the details would be determined with time. In so doing, each stated the reasons for his choice, and when it was Turgenev's turn, he said in French: "Le President sans phrases", that is: The president without long debates. Finally everyone unanimously accepted a republican government. During the speeches, only Glinka had spoken in favour of monarchical government, proposing Empress Elizabeth.[2] The Main Duma then informed all the local dumas of this conclusion, including the duma in Tulchin.[3] From that time on, republican concepts began to win the upper hand over monarchical ones.

Therefore, even after the declaration in Moscow at the beginning of 1821 that the Union of Welfare was dissolved, republican government continued to be the aim of those sections of the Union of Welfare which did not accept the declared dissolution.

FROM THE STATUTES OF THE UNION OF WELFARE (THE GREEN BOOK)[1]

Book One

THE AIM OF THE UNION OF WELFARE

§ 1. Convinced that good morality is the firm foundation of well-being and national honour, and that, despite all its concern, the government can scarcely achieve

this as its end if the governed, for their part, do not assist it in these beneficient intentions, the Union of Welfare assumes the sacred duty, by spreading among its compatriots the true rules of morality and enlightenment, of assisting the government to raise Russia to that level of greatness and prosperity to which she is destined by her Maker.

§ 2. Having as its aim the well-being of the fatherland, the Union does not conceal this aim from well-intentioned citizens, but, in order to avoid the reproaches of malice and envy, its activities must be conducted in secret.

...§ 5. The aim of the Union has four main branches: 1st—love of humanity; 2nd—education; 3rd—jurisprudence; 4th—public economy.

Book Two

GENERAL LAWS OF THE UNION OF WELFARE

Chapter I

Quality of Candidates, General Obligations and Rights of Members

1. Quality of Candidates

§ 1. The Union of Welfare, having the general good as its aim, invites all those whose honourable lives are worthy of a society of good name and those who, sensible of the grandeur of the aim of the Union, are prepared to bear all difficulties accompanying its pursuit.

§ 2. The Union takes no account of differences in wealth and social estates: all Russian citizens, nobles, clergy, merchants, traders and free people who meet the above-mentioned conditions, confess the Christian faith and are no less than 18 years old, may be accepted into the Union of Welfare...

§ 4. Any who was known as a dishonourable man and has failed to re-establish his name cannot be accepted into the Union of Welfare.

In general, all those who are dissolute, vicious and governed by low passions are not admitted into the Union.

II. Obligations of Members

§5. Each member, on joining the Union, is obliged, according to his abilities, to enroll in one of the branches designated in the aim, and to promote it as far as possible by his labours.

§6. Each member is obliged to obey unconditionally all the lawful commands of the authorities of the Union; zealously to fulfill all the tasks entrusted to him, and to submit without resentment to all comments which the above-mentioned authorities may make with regard to the non-fulfillment of obligations.

§7. Members of the Union not only must not withdraw from public duties, but, as true sons of the fatherland, should accept them with pleasure, fulfill them with zeal, and both by irreproachable behaviour and by justice and nobility, elevate in the eyes of others the position they occupy.

FROM "A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS SECRET SOCIETIES WHOSE REAL OR FICTITIOUS EXISTENCE WAS DISCOVERED BY THE COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY"[1]

Presented in May, 1826, by the Chairman of the Committee of Enquiry, Alexander Tatishchev,[2] to Emperor Nicholas I

Early Decembrist Organisations

At the end of May, 1826, when the investigations into the Decembrist case had finished, Nicholas I instructed the steward of the Committee of Enquiry, Alexander Borovkov, to draw up a brief report on all the secret organisations and circles brought to light in the course of the enquiry.

The Union of Salvation or the True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland

In 1816, Alexander Muravyov, Nikita Muravyov and Prince Sergei Trubetskoy, having learned of the existence in Germany of secret societies with political aims while they were there during the campaigns of 1813, 1814 and 1815, conceived the idea of introducing something

similar in Russia. They also at that time communicated this same idea to Yakushkin and the brothers Sergei and Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, but did not as yet proceed to the execution of their plans. It was only in February of the following year (1817), when Nikita Muravyov, having made the acquaintance of Pavel Pestel, introduced him to Alexander Muravyov, who had close contact with Sergei Trubetskoy, that their first Secret Society was instituted under the name of The Union of Salvation or the True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland.

The statutes were drawn up by Pestel. The Society was divided into three levels: brothers, men and boyars;* from this third, highest level were elected every month the elders: the Chairman, the Supervisor, the Secretary; solemn ceremonies were designated for new members; the one who wished to join the Society swore not to reveal anything of what he learned, even if it did not correspond to his own opinion; on joining he swore another oath; in additon, each level, even the elders, had its own oath. They undertook to strive for the aim of the Society and to obey the decision of the Supreme Council of Boyars. The name of the Boyars was to be a secret for the members of the lower levels. The chief, that is, the founding members of the Society were immediately called Boyars, but it was also possible to elevate a few new members to this rank. The purpose of the creation of this Society was, from the very beginning, to change the state order in Russia; but the means for achieving this had not yet been determined; the members undertook to work only for the benefit of the fatherland, to promote all that was of benefit, if not by co-operation, then at least by the expression of their approval, to seek to halt abuses by publicising reprehensible actions by officials not worthy of general confidence, and in particular to seek to strengthen the Society by the acquisition of new, reliable members, reporting in advance on their abilities and moral qualities, or even subjecting them to some test. This Society, owing to a disagreement between its founders and the new members, who did not agree with the statutes of the Union, enjoyed little success, and shortly thereafter (i.e. at the end

* According to certain statements, there was a fourth level of members within the Society—those not accepted into the Society, and sometimes even unaware of its existence, but considered, for whatever reason, to be of one mind with the rest; these were called friends.—*Appended commentary.*

of 1817 or the beginning of 1818), changed its organisation, having adopted the new name of Union of Welfare, and new statutes, written by Alexander and Nikita Muravyov, Prince Sergei Trubetskoy, Pyotr Koloshin and Prince Ilya Dolgoruky.

The Military Society or the Society of Military Men

Not long prior to the reorganisation of the Union of Salvation, the Society of Military Men was established under the chairmanship of Alexander Muravyov. It was intended to serve only as a method of examination; and its members, on the basis of their abilities and way of thinking, assessed by the members of the Union, could be accepted into the lower level of the Union, i.e. into the brotherhood, or introduced into the number of friends; those who did not furnish any hope nor reveal similarity of views were gradually excluded, and relations with them ceased. The members of the Military Society were not informed of the existence of the Union of Salvation, nor of any political aim; they were only invited to help, by financial contributions, to improve the lot of widows and orphans of soldiers fallen in battle, and they were required to say nothing about the existence of the Society on the grounds that good deeds should be done in secret. Very occasionally they met at Alexander Muravyov's, and he, together with his confederates in the Union, sought, by means of provocative discussions, to determine the mind of each. This Society did not continue long, almost none of its members entered the Union of Salvation, and with the organisation of the Union of Welfare it was dissolved, the founder himself, Alexander Myravyov, declaring that he does not remember it...

The Union of Welfare or the Society of the Green Book

The Society created in 1817 by Alexander and Nikita Muravyov, Pavel Pestel, and Prince Sergei Trubetskoy under the name of the Union of Salvation or the True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland, having changed in 1818 its organisation and statutes, took the name of the Union of Welfare.

These statutes, written by Alexander, Mikhail and Nikita Muravyov, Sergei Trubetskoy, Pyotr Koloshin and Prince Ilya Dolgoruky, were borrowed from the statutes published in the journal *Freiwillige Blätter*, which are

thought to have regulated the Tugendbund which existed in Germany... From this outline [of the statutes.—*Comp.*] it is clear that only the founders of the Society, or those who initially entered it, were called Main Members, the Main Union, the Main Board, the Main Council; they alone governed the Union of Welfare, retaining in their hands all power and concealing their real intentions under the veil of secrecy; they alone could direct it to any end. None of the remaining members that they accepted, to whom the real and secret purpose (a change in the state order) was not disclosed, could perceive anything reprehensible in what they were told. "The well-being of the fatherland," said the founders, "is the sole inspiration of the members, this aim cannot be objectionable to the government, for the government, notwithstanding its powerful influence, has need of the assistance of private individuals, and we will be its zealous assistants in good, and, not concealing our intentions from benevolent citizens, we will work in secret solely to avoid reproach, malice and hatred." The objects of the activity of each member was designated as follows: philanthropy, intellectual and moral self-education, observance of the behaviour of civil servants, i.e. identification of abuses and of the commendable actions of each in order to reveal the first to the government and encourage the latter by praise and even financial reward. Deceived by this benevolent exterior, many young people entered the Union, and some of them even suggested that the highest approval be sought for the creation of the Society, but these suggestions were, of course, unanimously rejected by the Main Council. The statutes, of which only the first part had been composed, were written out by hand, and were kept in a small book with a green cover, which is why the Society itself was sometimes called the Society of the Green Book. At the beginning of 1820 some of the main members, having gathered at the home of Colonel Fyodor Glinka, discussed the best form of government for Russia, and by a majority of votes proposed to introduce with time a republican government. Thereafter republican ideas became dominant in the Main Union. However, there shortly emerged a divergence of opinions; some of the main members, horrified at the audacity of their undertaking, became sensible of their error, displayed a more reasonable frame of mind and cooled towards the Society; the founders, scattered around the country (in St Pe-

tersburg, Moscow and Tulchin), did not act in concert; the activity of many members ceased. In order to put an end to such disagreement and dissension, which threatened the Society with collapse, it was decided that delegates from all the branches gather in Moscow in order to define the future aims and activities of the Union. These delegates did indeed gather in Moscow in the month of February [January.—*Comp.*], 1821; but after long debates and heated arguments, which only further increased the dissensions, and seeing the impossibility of securing the general acceptance of one fundamental view, they decided to dissolve the Society.

Nikolai Turgenev, acting as the chairman in the name of all the plenipotentiary members, informed the rest that the Union of Welfare had been entirely and permanently dissolved both as a result of the dissensions that had arisen within it, and in order to avoid arousing the suspicions of the government. The Green Book and other papers were burned, and news of the dissolution of the Union of Welfare was passed on to all the other members by the returning delegates.

However, the real reason which had moved them to make this proclamation was the feeling that the statutes did not give a clear definition of the purpose of the Society, as a result of which its activity was reduced, and also the desire to expell those members whose enthusiasm had cooled, or who, by their character and way of thinking, appeared not suited to assist the Main Board. At the same time the leaders agreed to create a new secret society, adopting as a rule to select members with greater caution and on accurate testimony of their similar views, to conceal their plans by a more impenetrable secrecy, and to act more decisively in the achievement of their aim—the overthrow of the existing order of things in the state...

"HE PLEDGES HIMSELF TO THE TSAR AND TO SERVICE FOR 25 YEARS, TO BEAR DIFFICULTIES AND TO MEET SUFFERING AND DEATH WITH UNPROTESTING OBEDIENCE."

Vladimir Rayevsky. From "Reflections on the Soldier"[1]

The disturbances in the Semyonovsky Guards Regiment in 1820 were the first open sign of oppositon by the mass of soldiers to

serfdom in the Russian army. The immediate cause of the disturbances was the increasing oppression in the army following the war of 1812, the introduction of ruthless discipline and exhausting drill. This "new" order was particularly resented in the Life-Guards of the Semyonovsky Regiment—the "first regiment" in Russia—which had been created by Peter the Great[2] and enjoyed a particularly privileged position (the patron of the regiment was Emperor Alexander I himself). Many Decembrists had served at some time in the Semyonovsky Regiment (Ivan Yakushkin, Sergei Trubetskoy, Fyodor Shakhovskoy, Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin, the brothers Matvei and Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Alexei Tiutchev and others), and they had abolished corporal punishment in their units, preaching a humane attitude towards the soldiers in word and deed. As has already been mentioned, it was among the officers of the Semyonovsky Regiment that the first Decembrist organisation arose—the Union of Salvation.

The disturbances in the Semyonovsky Regiment aroused deep anxiety in government and military circles. The Decembrist Fyodor Glinka, who was then an adjutant under Miloradovich,[3] wrote afterwards: "We were on permanent alert—every possible measure to defend the city had been taken. Throughout the whole night the district police arrived every half-hour, and special police every hour. They brought oral and written reports, dispatched couriers, ceaselessly sent gendarmes on patrol, and there was dreadful alarm." Disquiet began in other Guards regiments in the capital. In the barracks of the Preobrazhensky Regiment a proclamation was discovered, allegedly written in the name of the Semyonovsky Regiment, which appealed for them "to go to the aid of the Semyonovsky soldiers". The proclamation was clearly anti-tsarist in tone (it referred to the tsar as "a powerful bandit"). The author of the proclamation was not discovered despite the most exhaustive enquiry.

Alexander I was at the time attending a congress of the Holy Alliance in Troppau. Having received a report on the disturbances, the tsar dealt out harsh reprisals to his favourites regiment: he instructed it to be dissolved. Around 800 soldiers were court-martialled; 9 "instigators of the disorders" were subjected to brutal corporal punishment, many transferred to distant garrisons. Subsequently Decembrists, members of the Southern Society, who were serving in these military units, drew in former Semyonovsky officers and they began to conduct propaganda among other soldiers, preparing them for an armed uprising.

The disturbances in the Semyonovsky Regiment reverberated through Society and greatly influenced the development by the Decembrists of a plan for a military coup. At the same time, the government sharply intensified its reactionary political policy. Alexander I was convinced that the disturbances in the Semyonovsky Regiment had been deliberately provoked by the Secret Society. Secret police were introduced into the army. In this situation of increasing surveillance and report, the Decembrists, at the beginning of 1821, decided to reorganise the Secret Society and to maintain greater secrecy in its activity.

In Russia the military class constitutes as it were a separate section of the population. Different laws, different duties and a totally different way of thinking separate it from the civilian.

The nobleman or officer is an exception. He can leave military service and again become that selfsame nobleman. Consequently his fate does not merit attention, a worthy and courageous officer will find help even in poverty, and the ignoramus and the scoundrel do not deserve compassion.

But it is of the soldier that I wish to speak...

On Entry into Service

From 18 to 30 years is the age when a man of a certain height and strong constitution is accepted for military service. And at this age, suddenly, quitting his family, his agricultural condition and this uniform way of life to which he is accustomed, he pledges himself to the tsar and to service for 25 years, to bear difficulties and to meet suffering and death with unprotesting obedience. Dreadful pledge! An impossible, so it would seem, sacrifice! But the need to ensure public security, and the skilful construction of the machine of government operate constantly, and the soldier begins to reason and act as it is determined that he should reason and act.

On Labour in Time of Peace

1. Training and 2. Guard duty are the obligations ascribed by the law to the soldier in time of peace.

A soldier well provided for and under good officers considers the first as a substitute for entertainment; the second he considers essential, and even sees it as shameful to evade it.

He seeks to learn about the front, the precision of the business, to fulfill all that is required of him, because he sees linked to this the honour of his superiors, a certain easing of his own life, an unfailing necessity, and even that alone to which he is destined in time of peace. And he sees peaceful excercises as a preparation for war.

It cannot be denied (even in our age, purged of prejudices) that the military are useful and necessary. The throne and the people rest upon them for security against external danger and internal disturbance.

Therefore, it is unquestionably necessary to demand that the soldier rigorously perform his duties, but to ease his lot is demanded both by religion and the laws of honour!

The officer or nobleman has the right (if he is dissatisfied) to leave the service—the officer has in sight the rewards of honour and monetary reward, for both of which, in our monarchical government, all the nobility serve. But the soldier has in sight poverty, labour and death. It is rare, very rare, to serve 25 years without one violation, and having committed one violation, he is doomed to service for life!

Such are the heavy rules under which the peasant dons his uniform. Yet his lot would yet be bearable if creeping abuse, based on extortion and inhumanity, did not exceed its bounds and did not load the soldier with the chains of unlawful violence, did not oblige him to see in his superiors tyrants whom he fears and loathes.

One of our generals said that the soldier complains to the one he trusts the most! An indisputable fact. But do we not have before our eyes the example that complaints against one's oppressors are considered a crime?

Vorontsov[4] permitted the injured man to come directly to him ... abolished beatings, and never did the Special Corps abroad [in France.—*Comp.*] have better discipline or better organisation under the most systematic rule of the rod!

From this it may be concluded that the prime evil which has crept into the Russian army, are the inordinately brutal corporal punishments inflicted by the officers, against all law, to improve the soldiers, and, to our misfortune and shame, other measures remain incomprehensible to the greater part of them!

"THE SOLDIERS VOWED TO EACH OTHER THAT THEY WOULD STAND BEHIND THEIR 'OLD-TIMERS' OR PERISH WITH THEM."

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. "The Semyonovsky Affair of 1820"[1]

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol (1793-1886) was a retired colonel, the elder brother of the prominent Decembrist, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol (1796-1826), and had taken part in the war of 1812 and the campaigns abroad in 1813 and 1814. He had served in the

Semyonovsky Guards Regiment, and had been involved in the insurrection by the Chernigovsky Regiment in the south of the country, which had been led by his brother Sergei. The court sentenced him to death, which was commuted to 20 years penal servitude.

The account given here by Matvei Muravyov-Apostol of the disturbances in the Semyonovsky Regiment is based on information given him by his brother Sergei, who was then serving in the regiment.

1812, 1813 and 1814 allowed us to come to know and draw closer to our men. We were all filled with the sense of the duty of service. The good discipline of the soldiers depended upon the decency and conduct of the officers and corresponded to it. Each of us felt his own worthiness, and therefore was able to respect it in others. Our military service in no way suffered from these good relations which had arisen between men and officers. The unanimity of the latter among themselves was without precedent...

With the appointment of Major-General Potyomkin[2] as our regimental commander, a man who had served honourably in the war, beloved of the soldiers and respected by the officers, a man of good will and good society, our regiment yet further improved from a moral point of view. Therefore it was natural that corporal punishment (under which our soldiers died in the army as in the Guards) was, after three years campaigning abroad, not only unknown, but unthinkable in the old Semyonovsky Regiment; it was abolished with the agreement of all the company commanders, and with the permission of Potyomkin. Was it thinkable to beat heroes who had courageously and whole-heartedly defended their homeland, despite the existence of serfdom, who had won fame abroad by their unfailing bravery and magnanimity?

Mikhail,[3] who had only just cast aside his childhood chothes, was appointed the commander of the 1st Guards Infantry Brigade. The kind heart of the Grand Prince, about which so much is now written, was roused to indignation on learning that we did not beat our soldiers. He tried every possible means to discover the Semyonovsky Regiment guilty of some indiscipline by arriving at night to inspect the watch in Galernaya Harbour and paying unexpected visits to those on duty. All of this brought him nothing. Everywhere and always he found that everything was in order and duties strictly fulfilled.

This only increased his fury and set him against a regiment he abhorred. Naturally, the Grand Prince was also not favourably disposed to our general, with whom he had nothing in common. For that reason we were constantly pestered in an attempt to find something, anything, true or untrue, if not indiscipline then at least some errors.

In 1817 aide-de-camp Kleinmikhel was appointed drill-major. His duty consisted in making a note of the mistakes made during training that took place prior to the march past in front of Alexander I. His Majesty, like his late father, saw it as his sacred duty to attend every march past. We then had various marching steps: the St Petersburg, the Mogilev and the Warsaw. The difference between them was the number per minute. A musician held a chronometer and timed the steps accordingly.

Plumes an *arshin** in length were attached to the upper part of the shako. The uniform of the time, the joints in the accoutrements, the folded greatcoat worn across one shoulder and on top a knapsack with a belt across it—in this situation the soldier was required to march and manipulate his rifle without causing the plume to sway.

The adjutant-general, commander of the Royal Grenadier Regiment, Zheltukhin (famous for his brutality), trained his regiment to this ideal of perfection. When a recruit arrived in the regiment he would say to his company commander: "Here are three men for you, turn them into one corporal."

Kleinmikhel's comments on the swaying plumes appeared the day following each march past. These comments struck at our regiment after 1812, when Alexander I threw off the guise of benevolence he had worn until that time...

At that time service in the ranks was not service but brutal torture. Of all the Guards regiments, the Semyonovsky Regiment was the only one which had abolished corporal punishment.

The brutality and coarseness introduced by Pavel[4] was not eliminated during the reign of Alexander I and was highly valued. An illustration of this is provided by the aide-de-camp and favourite of Alexander and Grand Princes Nikolai and Mikhail, the commander of the Hussar Guards Regiment, Vasilii Levashov.[5]

* *Arshin*—a Russian linear measure equal to approximately 71 cm.

Once, at Tsarskoye Selo, Levashov ordered the cavalry sergeant-major to line up his squadron the next day in the riding school, after which he left for St Petersburg. The sergeant-major relayed the instruction to the squadron-leader, Colonel Zlotvinsky. He informed the sergeant-major that the next day was a major religious holiday, and that he was also leaving for St Petersburg. Levashov, returning the next day to Tsarskoye Selo, went directly to the riding school, but did not find the squadron there. He went home, sent for the sergeant-major and for sticks; sitting down to dine, he ordered that the sergeant-major be punished, and shouted out several times: "I can't hear anything (the sound of blows)!" When he got up from the table, the sergeant-major was taken to hospital, and there the old sergeant-major, with many years of service behind him, soon died. The whole of the Guards knew of the action of Levashov and the death of the sergeant-major. Colonel Zlotvinsky left the regiment following the murder. None of this prevented Levashov from continuing to be the favourite [of the tsar.—*Comp.*], and the commander of the Hussar Guards, enjoying more favour than before...

[I was once walking.—*Comp.*] across the Isaakiyevsky Bridge and I saw a soldier of the Grenadier Regiment climb over the railing at the front of a lighter, take off his shako and accoutrements, cross himself and jump into the Neva. When he was removing his uniform, I did not understand what he was doing. It never occurred to me that he was about to take his own life. It often happens that soldiers kill the first person they come across, preferring penal servitude to life as a soldier.

We were harassed because we did not drive people to such extremes. [Prince.—*Comp.*] Mikhail and Arakcheyev finally secured the replacement of Potyomkin by Shwarz (a pupil of Zheltukhin, who outstripped his tutor in brutality), who had presented [Potyomkin.—*Comp.*] as incapable of commanding a regiment because of excessive mildness. After this, Alexander I, formerly well-disposed to Potyomkin, cooled totally towards him.

Shwarz was in command of the Kaluzhsky Grenadier Regiment. It was well-known that he ordered his soldiers to take off their boots when he was dissatisfied with how they marched, and obliged them to goose-step across the dry stubble of an open field; furthermore, he punished his soldiers pitilessly, and was known in the army

by the graveyard of his name.

Shwarz took charge of our regiment according to his own views. Having learned that corporal punishment had been abolished, he did not at first have recourse to it as he did later; but, dissatisfied with the training, he made one line of soldiers face the other and forced them to spit at each other; he tripled the drills; in addition he demanded from all 12 companies in turn 10 men whom he trained for his own pleasure in his own hall, diversifying the tortures: they were obliged to stand motionless for hours, their legs were bound in planks, they were pricked with forks, etc. Apart from the physical suffering and exhaustion, he impoverished them, not releasing them to work. The constant cleaning cost the soldier money, this was reflected in his food, and the whole resulted in illness and mortality. To complete it all, Shwarz began to transfer soldiers to the Grenadier companies for no other reason than that they were handsome, and at the same time to transfer old distinguished Grenadiers to other companies for no reason whatever, thus not only depriving them of money, but also of merited distinctions.

Mikhail was exceptionally pleased with Shwarz, encouraged him with daily visits, presented him with horses, a carriage, etc. The officers did not provoke the indignation of the soldiers, but it was universal and came to the surface of its own accord. The oppressed expected a lightening of their lot and placed their hopes on the inspection review. However, the corps commander had already heard of the dissatisfaction of the troops with Shwarz. The feeble-minded [i.e. short-sighted.—*Comp.*] Vasilchikov[6] decided to stifle the murmurings instantly by refusing, on his own initiative, to heed the complaints. Thus the soldiers were obliged to keep silent, numb with surprise. After the review, Vasilchikov congratulated Shwarz on the discipline and good treatment of his subordinates, and left to have breakfast with him.

Our 1st Grenadier Company, a model company in every respect, was considered the head of the regiment. It was composed of hand-picked soldiers with years of distinguished service and numerous battle scars, who enjoyed special privileges and were known personally to Alexander.

These honoured veterans, after the evening roll-call, asked their company commander, Captain Nikolai

Kashkarov, through their sergeant-major, to visit their company. They told him that they had neither the strength nor the means to continue serving under the command of Shwarz, and that therefore they were requesting him to accept their complaint for consideration. Kashkarov persuaded the company to reserve its complaint until a more favourable time. They then told him that, at the last regimental inspection, Vasilchikov had ridden up to them, had said that he was aware that certain soldiers were dissatisfied with Shwarz, but that if any of them expressed that dissatisfaction during the inspection, he would die under the rods. And the company repeated its request to have its complaint considered immediately, so that it would be known that not merely certain soldiers but the entire company was dissatisfied with Shwarz, and that the 1yst Company had the right to complain on behalf of the entire regiment.

Kashkarov reported this incident to Colonel Vadkovsky,[7] who tried to reason with Shwarz. However, Shwarz then reprimanded him for indulgence towards the soldiers, and complained to [Prince.—*Comp.*] Mikhail about the soldiers and officers in his regiment; the Grand Prince complained to the divisional commander, Paskevich, and Paskevich complained to the corps commander, Vasilchikov.

In the third hour after midday of that day when the 1st Company complained, the Grand Prince kept the company on its feet for a further two hours, demanding that the rebels be identified. The company stood as if carved of stone—and Mikhail left, furious at his failure.

The following day, in the evening, Vasilchikov demanded that the company come to headquarters without their accoutrements for questioning. Before they had reached the gates of Headquarters, someone declared that the Headquarters building did not have room to hold a company, and therefore the company had been ordered to go to the palace riding school. On entering, the company was amazed to see the gates open at both ends, and two platoons of the Pavlovsky Regiment rode in and cocked their loaded rifles. Vasilchikov dispatched the company to the SS Peter and Paul Fortress.

One of the Pavlovsky Regiment soldiers from the convoy ran through the corridors of the Semyonovsky Regiment barracks shouting that the 1st Company had

been taken to the fortress.

All of the remaining 11 companies of the Semyonovsky Regiment went out onto the square in front of their infirmary. Insulted and apprehensive, the soldiers vowed to each other that they would stand behind their "old-timers" or perish with them. They were hoping for the support of the sovereign, supposing that he would not allow his favourite regiment which, during the reign of Pavel, had been under his personal command, to be thus treated.

[Prince.—*Comp.*] Mikhail and Vasilchikov appeared and ordered the men to line up. The soldiers replied that, when the head is missing, the legs do not function. The Grand Prince, not remarkable for his quick-wittedness, asked them the reason for their behaviour. "That you've bartered us for Germans,"* replied one of them.

The investigation commission tried to discover who had thus replied to Mikhail's question. Three soldiers were brought before the commission. In reply to the chairman's question: "Who answered the Grand Prince?" one of them said: "Your Excellency, allow me to ask, which of us three came into the room first?" The chairman pointed to one of the soldiers. "Your Excellency! I was the first to come into the room. You could not fail to see that in the daytime, but at night, when it is dark, is it possible to make out an individual face in a crowd so as to recognise him later?"

Anticipating no relief for their miseries, the Semyonovsky Regiment soldiers sought, in their bitterness, to kill Shwarz, but he hid himself in a pile of manure.

Vasilchikov asked them one last time what they wanted. "Return our old-timers, or else imprison us with them."

The regiment was ordered to go to the fortress. In a moment the soldiers lined up in their battalions and marched in total silence to the fortress. It was only the next day that those who lived on the streets through which they had passed learned that the Semyonovsky Regiment had been imprisoned in the fortress...

* The soldiers hinted at Shwarz, Benkendorf and other officers and generals from among the Baltic Germans serving in Russia.—*Comp.*

They "FOUND IT NECESSARY TO TERMINATE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE UNION OF WELFARE."

From the Reminiscences of Ivan Yakushkin on the Moscow Congress of 1821 and the Dissolution of the Union of Welfare[1]

...In the first days of January of the year 21, Grabbe, Burtsov[2] and myself were living at the Fonvizins. Shortly thereafter Nikolai Turgenev and Fyodor Glinka arrived in Moscow from St Petersburg, followed by Mikhail Orlov and Okhotnikov[3] from Kiev... The first of these meetings was attended by Orlov, Okhotnikov, N. Turgenev, F. Glinka, the two Fonvizin brothers, Grabbe, Burtsov and myself.

The next meetings were attended by the same members, except for Orlov. In order to keep the meetings in better order, N. Turgenev was elected chairman.

First of all the need was recognised to change not only the statutes of the Union of Welfare, but also the very organisation and composition of the society. It was decided to proclaim everywhere, in all the boards, that, as in the then-existing circumstances the least lack of caution could arouse the suspicion of the government, the Union of Welfare was ceasing its activity permanently. By this measure the unreliable members were removed from the Society. In the new statutes, the aim and the methods for attaining it were defined more precisely than they had been in the statutes of the Union of Welfare, and therefore it was possible to hope that those members in whose zeal it was impossible to doubt, uniting together, would constitute one whole and, acting in concert, would give new life to the Secret Society. Then we moved on to the composition of the new statutes; they were divided into two parts: in the first, the same philanthropic aims were proposed for the members as had been in the Green Book. It was Burtsov who took charge of drafting this part. The second part was written by N. Turgenev for members of the highest level. In this part of the statutes it was directly stated that the aim of the Society was to restrict autocracy in Russia, and in order to acquire the means necessary for this, it was recognised as essential to influence the troops and prepare them for any possibility. Initially it was proposed to establish four main dumas: one in St Petersburg under the

leadership of N. Turgenev, another in Moscow, of which Ivan Fonvizin was to take charge. I was to form the third in Smolensk Gubernia, and Burtsov was to bring order to the fourth, in Tulchin.[4] He assured us that, on arriving in Tulchin, he would first of all declare the Union of Welfare to be dissolved, but would then inform all the members, except those who supported Pestel, about the existence of the new statutes, and that they would all unite under their guidance.[5] The statutes were signed by all the members present at the meeting, and by Mikhail Muravyov, who arrived in Moscow at the very end of our gatherings. Four copies were made of both parts of the new statutes: one for N. Turgenev, another for I. Fonvizin, a third for myself, and a fourth for Burtsov. But all the members then in Moscow were invited to one of the very first meetings. This meeting was attended by Sergei Volkonsky, Komarov, Pyotr Koloshin and many others. Turgenev, as our president, told all those present that the Union of Welfare no longer existed, and explained to them the reasons for its dissolution.

On arriving in St Petersburg, Turgenev declared that the members in Moscow had found it necessary to terminate the activities of the Union of Welfare, and then read the new statutes of the Society to Nikita Muravyov alone, after which, as a precautionary measure, he put them in a bottle and covered them with tobacco. The new Society[6] consisting of the St Petersburg members was formed by Nikita Muravyov.

FROM "A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS SECRET SOCIETIES WHOSE REAL OR FICTITIOUS EXISTENCE WAS DISCOVERED BY THE COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY"[1]

Societies Which Emerged after the Dissolution of the Union of Welfare

Following the declaration at the Moscow congress of delegates that the Union of Welfare had been dissolved, some of the main founding members decided to renew the Society, having drawn up for it new rules and having defined more precisely its aim and activity. In St Petersburg, at the end of 1822, Nikolai Turgenev and Nikita Muravyov, having invited some of the members

of the old Union and accepted some new ones, formed a society, dividing it into the Union of the Convinced and the Union of the Associated. The Union of the Convinced was composed of the founders and it governed the Society by means of a Duma composed of three elected members. Into the Union of the Associated were accepted all the new members, and from it were chosen, with the agreement of the Duma, those who, in their opinion, were worthy of the Union of the Convinced. This upper circle alone knew of the methods for attaining the aim and of the time already appointed for the beginning of action; the members of the second circle, the associated, learned, gradually, only of the aim. In Tulchin, on the return of their delegates from Moscow, Pestel and Yushnevsky did not recognise the dissolution of the Union, convinced almost all their confederates in the 2nd Army, and having taken, together with many of them, the name of boyars of the Union, began actively to recruit new members, openly revealing to each other the desire to introduce a republican government. In accord with the statutes of the first Society, written by Pestel, they decided to divide the members into three levels (cf. Union of Salvation), but they deviated from this rule from the very beginning, and instead of a gradual revelation of their aims and means, they informed the members about all their ideas and intentions almost as soon as they joined. Only the leaders kept the name of boyars; friends, half accepted or half agreeing, was the name given to those whom they only hinted at the existence of the Society, and whom they hoped to induce to enter it later on. Both these societies, the one in St Petersburg and the one in Tulchin, soon entered into communication, and although at first they did not agree as to definitive means to be used to attain their goal, nor as regards the system of government they proposed to give Russia following the coup they were preparing, they nonetheless were united in their efforts, each according to its own rules, to attract more confederates and to prepare people for a change in the state order. These societies did not adopt any names, but were distinguished from each other by being referred to as the Northern and the Southern, the first being the St Petersburg Society, the second the Tulchin Society... In these societies there arose all the evil ideas and designs against the sovereign, the throne and the peace of the state which marked the rebellion of 14 December 1825.

"HE WAS ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE MEN OF HIS DAY."

Nikolai Lorer. "Reminiscences of Pestel"[1]

Nikolai Lorer (1795-1873), was a major, a member of the Northern and Southern Societies, had fought in the war of 1812 and in the campaigns of the Russian army abroad in 1813 and 1814, and was a friend of Pavel Pestel. He was condemned to 15 years penal servitude, to be followed by exile for life in Siberia. In 1837, on his own request, he was sent as a private to do active service with the army in the Caucasus. In 1842 he was made an officer for his bravery, and this gave him the right to retire and live on his small estate.

Barely three days had passed when I received a note from Obolensky, in which he told me that Pestel was in St Petersburg,[2] and advised me to introduce myself, proposing to undertake this introduction himself the next day. I agreed, and the next morning I set off for the Cavalierguards* barracks where Pestel was staying with his brother, then a cavalry captain in that regiment. Now he is a senator in Moscow. Obolensky, who was also there, introduced me and added: "one of ours".

And that was where I first met that intelligent and original man who played then and thereafter a major role in the Secret Society, and who was one of its leading members. Pestel was not very tall, with brown hair and black, mobile but pleasant eyes. Then, as now, when I recall him, he reminded me of Napoleon I. He was wearing a long, wide army frock-coat with a red collar, and tarnished staff-officer epaulettes which lay back rather than forward on his shoulders. At first he received me coldly, but on learning that I was a member of the Society Pestel smiled and offered his hand, and immediately, as if on cue, said to Obolensky:

"Here in St Petersburg nothing is being done, everyone sits around with folded arms; down south things are going better. And I have heard a great deal about you, a great deal of good, and you have only now been accepted... That is unforgivable on the part of the Northern Society. I think," he continued, "that it will soon be possible to begin our business."

Being still a new member, guessing a great deal but

* Cavalierguards—the imperial horseguards.

not fully understanding what this business was, I recall that at the time his words surprised me and made me feel somewhat timid. We parted having agreed that we would meet in the regiment as fellow-officers.

The Vyatsky Regiment was quartered in Lintsy*... On arriving I immediately sent to enquire whether Colonel Pestel was at home. I was requested to come to dine. There I found a large gathering of people wholly unknown to me, namely, Vasilii Davydov, a retired colonel, Vladimir Likharev, a second lieutenant with the General Staff, Bestuzhev-Riumin, a lieutenant from the Poltavsky Infantry Regiment, and several officers from the Vyatsky Regiment. Pestel, after a formal introduction, called me a member of the Society and everyone began to talk with me more freely...

Having settled into the regiment and spent two years constantly in the company of Pestel up to the moment when fate so harshly separated us—and forever—I came to know him intimately, and I can say of him that he was one of the most remarkable men of his day. He lived openly, I and the staff officers of the regiment always dined with him. His living quarters were very modest—on the square facing the excercise house,—but along the whole length of his few rooms stretched shelves of books, mainly political, economic and in general of an educative nature, and all kinds of constitutions. I could not say what this man had not read, in his time, in many foreign languages. He devoted 12 years to writing his *Russkaya Pravda.*[3] Moreover, Pestel had an encyclopedic memory. When he had to absent himself from home for some length of time he would often leave his *Russkaya Pravda* with me—thus did he once watch over his brain-child! I read that constitution for Russia several times, and I remember that the Introduction was absorbing, brilliantly written...

Pestel was truly a man of great capabilities, but then we found him too self-confident; and for the republic of which he dreamed he lacked sufficient virtue. True, he was a defender of liberty, yet at the same time he was unduly interested in ambition...

It was a pleasure to listen to Pestel speak, for he was a masterly orator and was always able to convince, but frequently his words revealed excessive ambition and conceit. He himself once admitted that many had point-

* Lintsy—a small town in the Western Ukraine.

ed this out to him, and that he usually replied:

"In our business it is necessary to have more ambition, that alone can inspire us to a most rapid start. As for myself, I give you my word, when the Russian people are happy, having adopted the *Russkaya Pravda*, I will withdraw into a monastery and will live out my life a monk."

"Yes," I answered him, smiling, "so that they should come and bear you ceremoniously out on their arms!"

"In any case," he interrupted me, "he who is fated to be hanged does not drown, and I did not drown, for as a child, when my father sent me with my elder brother to Dresden for our education, he reserved a place for us on board a merchant ship sailing from Kronstadt. Everything was ready, we had already said farewell to our father, when suddenly he took it into his head not to let us go aboard the ship, and ordered our things to be transferred to another vessel... At the time, having done as he ordered, we simply wondered at the eccentricity of the old man, but imagine our surprise when, having arrived safely in Dresden, we learned that the ship we had left had not arrived at its destination, but had sunk without trace, together with its passengers and cargo. The heart of our old father had accurately sensed the disaster that was about to descend on the heads of his offspring. And so I remained among the living, as you see..."

Thus passed two years of my army service as a member of the Southern Society. I was often amazed at Pestel's memory and his ability to be constantly engaged in the important affairs of which he was in charge, while also commanding his regiment, which he did excellently and with extraordinary ease, as if with a wave of the hand, so that the corps commander once said of him: "I am surprised that Pestel should conduct drill excercises when his intelligence demands that he be a minister, an envoy!"

During the Greek uprising, when Ypsilanti,[4] then serving as our general and a man close to Alexander I, not knowing whether his compatriots were prepared, threw himself,without reflection and under the influence of his own noble sentiments, into the struggle and fell, taking with him many of his comrades to their death—our sovereign, in support of the Holy Alliance and rigorous non-intervention, asked Witgenstein, whose army was deployed on the borders of rebellious Molda-

via and Wallachia[5] as sharing the same faith as Greece and subjects of the same Turkey—whether there was not in the army a man capable of representing accurately the position of the Christian population of Moldavia and Wallachia; Count Witgenstein mentioned Pestel, who was then dispatched for this purpose. He honourably acquitted himself of this mission and wrote directly to the sovereign himself, in French. They say that when the sovereign read that clear exposition of the situation and gave it to Nesselrode,[6] the latter requested the sovereign to name a diplomat who could have described the situation in Greece and the position of the Christians so well, so perceptively and so accurately, and the sovereign is said to have smiled and replied: "No more and no less than an army colonel. So you see what colonels I have serving in my army!"

PAVEL PESTEL. "THE DEFINITION, AIM AND OPERATION OF THE 'RUSSKAYA PRAVDA'[1]

(Introduction to the Draft Constitution)

An outstanding leader and theoretician of the Decembrist movement, Pavel Pestel worked on his Draft Constitution *Russkaya Pravda* for about four years. The *Russkaya Pravda* by Pestel is the most important programme document of the Decembrists and an outstanding example of revolutionary ideology. It was intended to serve as a "mandate" to the future provisional revolutionary government. It constitutes a comprehensive and detailed plan for the revolutionary transformation of Russia. It sets forth in detail such fundamental Decembrist programme policies as the abolition of serfdom, absolutism and the old social estate system, and it makes consistent provision for the equality of all citizens before the law. "Slavery (serfdom) must be abolished resolutely, and the nobility must renounce for ever the base advantage of owning other people," wrote Pestel. "All the citizens of the state must enjoy the same rights and all be equal before the law."

The *Russkaya Pravda* is the first republican programme in the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia. Pestel was an ardent champion of the creation of a republic in Russia. Referring to the Russian autocracy as "mad malevolence", Pestel opposed any kind of monarchical government, even one restricted, by a constitution.

The Decembrists ascribed exceptional importance to this document. When, on the eve of his arrest, Pestel destroyed his papers, he took measures to preserve his *Russkaya Pravda*, fully aware that if it should be discovered by the investigating organs, it could

constitute a major piece of evidence against him. At the same time, the tsarist officials, understanding the significance of this document, resolved to find it at any cost. During the cross-examination of the arrested Decembrists, they learned where the *Russkaya Pravda* was hidden. Recovered from its hiding place, it was put before Emperor Nicholas I, who was so amazed by the radical nature of this document that he did not venture to reveal its contents even to the members of the Committee of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair. For more than 80 years the *Russkaya Pravda* of Pestel was held in strict secrecy in the recesses of the tsarist archives. It was only during the revolution of 1905-1907[2] in Russia that historians gained access to his document.

Below is the introductory section to the *Russkaya Pravda*.

The *Russkaya Pravda* is the supreme, All-Russian document defining all the changes that are to take place in the state, all that is liable to abolition and overthrow, and, finally, the fundamental laws and basic principles which are to serve as the invariable rule in erecting a new state order and compiling a new state code. It contains a definition of certain of the most important laws and decrees of the future order of things, an enumeration of the proposed transitional measures, and also an explanation of the fundamental considerations, basic causes and main conclusions confirming the state system proposed for Russia. Thus the *Russkaya Pravda* is a mandate or instruction for the Provisional Supreme Administration as regards its activity, and also a proclamation to the people about what they have been liberated from, and what they can now expect. It contains the obligations resting upon the Provisional Supreme Administration, and serves as a pledge that the Provisional Supreme Administration will act exclusively for the benefit of the fatherland. The lack of such a document has plunged many states into the most dreadful miseries and internal conflicts, as in these states the government could always act as it desired, according to personal passions and private views, not having before it a clear and comprehensive instruction that it was obliged to follow, while the people did not know what was being undertaken on their behalf, could not see clearly to what aim the government was striving in its actions and, disturbed by various fears, and then by various passions, often engaged in incoherent actions, finally leading to conflict. The *Russkaya Pravda* averts, by its existence, all this evil and leads state transformation along a positive course and into positive action by the fact that it defines everything

and issues fundamental rules on every subject. For this reason both the Provisional Supreme Administration, with all its parts, branches and levels, and the whole people, with all its members or citizens, are duty bound to act in full accord with it. The Provisional Supreme Administration is bound gradually to introduce and organise the new state order as defined by the *Russkaya Pravda*, and the people are bound not only not to oppose its introduction, but, on the contrary, to do all they can to assist the Provisional Supreme Administration, and not to impede the successful conclusion of national renewal and state transformation by undue impatience...

"I WAS BLINDED BY A BURNING DESIRE TO SEE RUSSIA ATTAIN THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF WELL-BEING."

Nikita Muravyov about His Membership of the Secret Society. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry, 5 January 1826[1]

My name is Nikita, son of Mikhail. I am in my thirtieth year. My faith is that of the Graeco-Russian Church. I confess and receive communion every year.

At first I received my education at home, and as I had many tutors who changed frequently, I cannot recall their names. Mainly I studied languages and mathematics. Later I attended lectures at Moscow University in Physics, Mathematics and Logic. Being in my sixteenth year when the campaign of 1812 interrupted my studies, I had no other ideas than a burning love of my native land.

I tried to perfect myself in military history, fortification and most of all in strategy, which I studied without a tutor.

The proclamations by the allied powers in 1813[2] proposing a representative government* for the peoples of Germany in place of [meaning "as".—*Comp.*] a reward for their efforts, first directed my attention to that question; subsequently I was confirmed in it by a speech delivered by the late emperor [Alexander I.—*Comp.*] to the Seym of the Kingdom of Poland, in which he declared his intention of introducing representative government in Russia...

* That is, a constitutional system with organs of power elected from among all social estates.

I was not accepted [into the Secret Society.—*Comp.*] by anyone, as the Society was composed of a whole circle of acquaintances in which I found myself.

I was blinded by a burning desire to see Russia attain the highest level of well-being by means of institutions equally beneficient [here in the sense of lawfully open, democratic.—*Comp.*] for all the social estates of people finding themselves in it [Russia.—*Comp.*] by the stable organisation of the processes of law in the lower instances, and by openness in all the actions of the government...

"THE SOURCE OF SUPREME POWER IS THE PEOPLE, TO WHOM BELONGS THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO ISSUE FUNDAMENTAL DECISIONS CONCERNING ITSELF."

From the Draft Constitution by Nikita Muravyov[1]

There have survived two versions of this Draft Constitution, and a brief summary of it made by Nikita Muravyov in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress at the request of the Committee of Enquiry. The most complete is the second version of the draft, extracts from which are quoted below.

The Constitution of Nikita Muravyov abolished the autocracy and the social estates, proclaimed the universal equality of all citizens before the law, the protection of the inviolability of the individual and of property, broad freedom of speech, publication and belief, and the fundamental reconstruction of the old judicial and administrative apparatus. It also solemnly proclaimed the abolition of serfdom: "Serfdom and slavery are annulled. The slave, touching the soil of Russia, becomes a free man." However, landed estates remained untouched: "The estates of the landowners remain in their possession." As for the rest, the landowners lost all their former class privileges and advantages. At the same time, the dominant influence in the political life of the country went to large property-owners, be it in capital or land: in order to be elected to central or local organs of power or to occupy a government post, large property requirements had to be met. Russia, according to the Draft Constitution of Nikita Muravyov, was to become a federation of 15 "states" with their own "capitals" and independent governments. The supreme executive power in the federation would belong to the emperor. He was to swear to uphold the Constitution and would be declared "the supreme official of the Russian government", answerable to the supreme legislative organ of power—the National *Veche*—and considerably restricted in his competence. Nikita Muravyov emphasised: "The

Russian people, free and independent, is not and cannot be the property of any individual or any family," and the monarchical form of government is retained "for convenience" and as a tribute to "tradition". Should the imperial family refuse to accept the Constitution, Nikita Muravyov envisaged that "it be expelled and a republican government proposed". The testimony of Nikita's younger brother, Alexander, is interesting: "The Committee [of Enquiry.—*Comp.*] did all it could to oblige Nikita Muravyov to testify that the Northern Society wanted a republic. Losing his patience at such relentless insistence, Nikita replied: "My Draft Constitution which you have in your hands is monarchical, but if you wish to know—knowledge has strengthened the initial direction of my political convictions, and now I loudly declare: from my heart I am a convinced republican!"

Introduction

The experience of every nation and age has shown that autocratic power is fatal for the ruler and society alike: that it is not in accord either with the rules of our holy faith, or with the principles of common sense. It is impossible to permit the will of one man to be the basis of government, it is impossible to agree that all rights should be on one side, and all obligations on the other. Blind obedience can be based only on fear and is not worthy either of an intelligent ruler or of intelligent executors of his will. In placing themselves above the law, the monarchs forgot that they are outside the law—outside mankind! That it is impossible for them to refer to the laws when it concerns others, while not recognising their [the laws'.—*Comp.*] existence as regards themselves. All the peoples of Europe are attaining laws and liberty. More than any other nation, the Russian deserves the one and the other.

Yet, what form of government is most suitable for them? Small nations are usually the prey of neighbours and do not enjoy independence. Large nations enjoy external independence, but usually suffer from internal oppression and are the instrument by which the despot oppresses and destroys neighbouring peoples. The vastness of their territory, the strength of the army prevent them from being free; those who do not have these disadvantages suffer from their impotence. A Federal or Union government alone would resolve this problem, would satisfy all the conditions and combine the greatness of the nation with the liberty of its citizens.

Chapter One

On the Russian People and Government

1. The Russian people, free and independent, is not and cannot be the property of one individual or one family.

2. The source of supreme power is the people, to whom belongs the exclusive right to issue fundamental decisions concerning itself.

Chapter Two

On Citizens

3. Citizenship is the right, in the manner set forth in these statutes, to take part in public government: indirectly, i.e. by the election of officials or electors, directly, i.e. by being elected to some public position in the legislative, executive or judicial power.

4. Citizens are those inhabitants of the Russian Empire who enjoy the rights listed below.

5. Citizenship is dependent upon the following conditions:

(1) No less than twenty-one years of age.
(2) Known or permanent place of residence.
(3) Sound mind.
(4) Personal independence.
(5) Correct fulfillment of public obligations.
(6) Without a criminal record.

"POLITICAL SCIENCES BECAME THE SOLE OBJECT OF HIS THOUGHTS."

Alexander Muravyov about His Brother, Nikita Muravyov. From His Recollections[1]

Alexander Muravyov (1802-1853) was the younger brother of the prominent member of the Decembrist movement, Nikita Muravyov. Both brothers received an excellent education at home—the best tutors were engaged to study with them. Subsequently Alexander Muravyov followed a course of lectures under leading professors, engaged in intensive self-education, and displayed particular in-

terest in works by the French Enlighteners of the 18th century. Accepted in 1824 as a member of the Northern Society, this young cornet with the Cavalierguard Regiment, Alexander Muravyov, took an active part in the affairs of that Secret Society: he disseminated the ideas of his elder brother, whom he idolised, and himself brought into the Secret Society six of his regimental associates. On the eve of the insurrection on 14 December, he attended conspiratorial meetings at the home of Ryleyev, at which the final plan for the uprising was elaborated. The Supreme Criminal Court condemned Alexander Muravyov to loss of noble rank and penal labour in exile for fifteen years. By a decree of 1832 Alexander Muravyov was released from penal labour, but did not wish to leave his brother Nikita, who was still serving his sentence, and voluntarily continued in penal servitude until 1835, when Nikita was also released. In September 1853, Nicholas I, after many petitions by relatives of Alexander Muravyov, allowed him to return from exile. However, he was unable to benefit from this permission: a few days before it arrived he died.

In the Northern [Society.—*Comp.*] Nikita Muravyov was appointed the dictator [head of the Society.—*Comp.*] In 1823 Prince Trubetskoy and Obolensky were made his assistants. Following the departure of Trubetskoy [to Kiev.—*Comp.*] Kondratii Ryleyev was elected to replace him. From that moment on the Northern Society acquired many new members... At their periodic meetings they learned of the relative success of the Society, discussed measures, the selection of new members, and new abuses perpetrated by the government. Not infrequently N. Muravyov, with his noble and expressive face, thoughtful and gentle smile, and with a manner of conversation full of a charm difficult to convey, would argue over his Draft Constitution and explain the Constitution of the United States of Northern America.

From an early age he had revealed outstanding abilities, a love for science, a pleasant character and elevated patriotism. My kind and respected mother, after the death of our father, whom she adored, left for Moscow in order to devote herself entirely to the upbringing of her children. My brother was seven years older than I. We spent the summer of 1812 in a countryhouse outside Moscow.

The victories which the enemy secured over us and the retreat of our army into the very heart of Russia tormented my brother's heart.[2] Every day he besieged mother for her permission to join the army. He became sad, silent and unable to sleep. Mother, although worried about his condition, could not give him the permission

he so desired because of his health, which had been poor since childhood. Mother refused to accept that he could survive the deprivations of an exhausting campaign. One morning, when we had all gathered round the table for tea, my brother was not to be found. He was sought everywhere. The day passed in heavy anxiety. My brother had left early in the morning in order to be able to join our army, which was approaching the walls of Moscow. He had not gone many miles before he was detained by peasants. Without a passport, well-dressed—and they found on him a map of the theatre of military operations and a paper showing the deployment of the enemy army! He was roughly treated, bound; taken back to Moscow and thrown into the city jail. The Governor-General, Count Rostopchin, sent for him and interrogated him. Amazed at such patriotism in one so young, he returned him to his mother, congratulating her on having such a son, inspired by such noble and elevated sentiments. I was very young, but the moving scene of his return, the embraces and tears of our mother, still live in my memory.

The excellent education which my brother received enabled him to be commissioned as an officer at Main Headquarters. He served with distinction in the campaigns of 1813, 1814 and 1815. On returning to the bosom of his family, he renewed his studies and led a quiet life. He wrote a biography of Suvorov,[3] which was published in the then well-known journal *Syn Otechestva* (Son of the Fatherland). He planned to write a critique of the *History* of Karamzin,[4] but only touched upon [that.—*Comp.*] subject: political sciences became the sole object of his thoughts...

"ALL THE ACTIONS IN THE LIFE OF RYLEYEV WERE MARKED WITH THE STAMP OF LOVE FOR HIS NATIVE LAND."

Nikolai Bestuzhev about Kondratii Ryleyev. From His Recollections[1]

Nikolai Bestuzhev (1791-1855) was the oldest of five brothers, all of whom were Decembrists. He was a lieutenant-captain in the navy and took part in the insurrection of 14 December. He was condemned to death, this sentence being commuted to penal ser-

vitude for life. Bestuzhev was a writer, essayist, scholar and artist. He wrote a number of novellas, tales and works on the history of the Russian navy. He also drew sketches of the Decembrists and their wives in exile. While living in exile in Siberia, he took up agronomy and the invention of various implements, and also taught local children to read and write.

...All the actions in the life of Ryleyev were marked with the stamp of love for his native land; this love manifested itself in various ways: first, in a filial attachment to his homeland, then indignation with abuses, which developed entirely into a desire for its freedom. In his *Reflections*[2] we see his ardent desire to inspire in others that same love for their country, for all that is of the people; to focus attention on the deeds of former days, to show that Russia is also rich in examples to be imitated, that these examples can be compared with the great models of antiquity.

In his "Satire on the Favourite"[3] he reveals all his contempt for the honours and power of a man who, by the whims of his despotism, sacrifices the happiness of his fellow-citizens. In that position in which Russia has found, and still finds herself, no one has ever attained such a high pinnacle of might and power as Arakcheyev, not having any particular title save that of the loyal servant of the tsar; this imperial retainer eschewing all power under the guise of personal modesty, alone, unseen by anyone, without any obvious position, in the secrecy of his office, manipulated the affairs of the state, and his malicious, suspect policy crept like a spy into every branch of government...

Such was the position of Russia when Ryleyev loudly and publicly challenged the favourite to appear before the court of truth; when he named his deeds, defined their price, and boldly handed over to the condemnation of future generations the blind or witting submission of the retainer to the oppression of his country.

It is impossible to imagine the amazement, horror, one might even say the stupefaction with which the residents of the capital heard such unprecedented words of truth and reproach, and saw this battle between David and Goliath. Everyone thought that vengeance would strike down and destroy the audacious poet and those who heeded him; but the representation was too accurate, too close, for the offended retainer to dare recognise himself in the satire.

He was ashamed to recognise openly, the storm-cloud passed by: the fetters of stupefaction fell away, gradually dissolved, and the muted murmur of approval was the reward of the honest composer. That was the first blow delivered by Ryleyev to the autocracy... It was with this verse that the political career of Ryleyev began. The fire of a youthful spirit, the burst of noble indignation and the apt satirical blows fearlessly delivered against such an opponent attracted universal attention.

Russia was already beginning to feel the burden of despotism, to see the miseries weighing on the country, and to ponder ways of introducing a new and better order of things. The Secret Society, composed of a few friends of humanity, already existed, and Ryleyev, enjoying universal respect for his services to humanity, rejoicing in merited praise for his poetic talent, was accepted into the Society with complete confidence in his character and opinions. Here the movements of his spirit, the heartfelt pain over the unhappiness of his native land, and his vague concepts for improving its lot were guided in the proper direction. From now on we see him acquire a new way of thinking, another way of behaving and acting. The fiery youth matured into a faithful and cautious man; the quick-tempered dare-devil became a secretive and enterprising conspirator; the audacious poet became a thoughtful writer who had ceased to thunder curses in the public square against ephemeral favourites, but in his compositions sought to direct the minds of his compatriots to a single aim, the noble liberty of nations.

Having served in the army (artillery), married and retired, he lived in his village. His qualities led his neighbours to choose him as a member of the criminal court for St Petersburg Gubernia.

His compassion for humanity, his impartiality, his passionate love of justice and tireless defence of the truth made his name known in the capital. Among ordinary people, his name and his integrity became proverbial... Once a petty bourgeois was detained on suspicion of having committed some major crime, and was brought before the then military governor, Miloradovich; there he was interrogated; however, as the degree of guilt could only be determined by the man's own confession, Miloradovich threatened him with every possible punishment if he did not confess. The man was innocent and did not want to take the blame for a crime he had not commit-

ted: then Miloradovich, weary of his denials, told him that he would hand him over to the criminal court, knowing how little trust the ordinary people had in the courts. He thought that fear would now cause the man to tell him the truth, but instead the man fell at his feet and wept in gratitude for his kindness.

"What kindness have I shown you?" asked the governor.

"You are going to hand me over to the court," replied the man, "and now I know that I will be released from all these sufferings and accusations. I know I will be vindicated: Ryleyev is there, and he will not let the innocent perish!"

This event reveals more than any praise the conduct of this man. I will pass over the case of the Razumovsky peasants:[4] Ryleyev's attitude with regards to these unfortunates was recorded with the power of feelings defending the cause of the innocent. The emperor, the favourites, the authorities, the judges playing up to force were all opposed, and Ryleyev alone stood on the side of the oppressed, and this will be an eternal monument to the cause of justice, a testimony to the boldness with which Ryleyev proclaimed the truth.

In addition to his noble sentiments, love for his homeland and the truth, his heart and mind were open to any noble impression. Love and friendship accompanied him throughout his life. I was a witness to his domestic life, heard him repeat to me many times how happy he was, enumerate the virtues of his wife and recount how much he loved her.

Ryleyev was particularly ardent in friendship. In his simple, even child-like relations with his friends, his heart was moved by the noblest sentiments towards them. Sacrifice, even self-sacrifice for friendship was as nought to him; the honour of a friend was, for him, greater than any other considerations. Neither conventions nor reasoning were strong enough to restrain his first reaction if a friend was offended...

All injustice, falsehood, and most particularly slander found in him a ruthless opponent: in such cases no respect could halt his indignation. He often castigated himself on seeing that his sharp defence of innocence had caused more harm than good; but as soon as another instance occurred, the same indomitable hatred for injustice repeated itself. That was his weakness, which inflicted sorrow on himself, his friends and his associates.

I called him a martyr to the truth.

To this was added yet another and more serious failing: his heart was too open, too trusting. In all men he saw good intent, never suspected deception and, deceived, continued to believe. Experience taught him nothing. He saw everything through the rose-coloured glasses of his own noble soul. Only his modesty and shyness saved him.

If a man was dissatisfied with the government and spoke ill of the authorities, Ryleyev thought him a liberal who sought the good of his native land. This was the cause of many of his errors in his political career.

I have referred to those of his weaknesses which would have been to the credit of any other man, but in Ryleyev, a political figure, they were a serious defect. Must I also add that he had insufficient confidence in himself, had too little sense of the power of his own spirit over others?

Ryleyev was not an eloquent speaker, and he won others not with the talents of rhetoric or the force of syllogisms, but with the passion of his simple and sometimes disconnected speech which, in its disjointed statements, expressed all the power of his thought, always noble, always truthful, always attractive. Most eloquent of all was his face, on which appeared, far more than in his words, all that he wanted to say, just as Moore said of Byron[5] that he resembled a clay vase on the surface of which there is no decoration, but, as soon as it is illuminated from within by a flame, the pictures chiselled inside by the skilled hand of the artist glow of their own accord. The truth is always eloquent, and Ryleyev, its beloved, surrounded by its charm and filled with its inspiration, often sought to convince others of propositions which his child-like prattle could not yet explain, nor get others to understand, but he divined them, and obliged others to divine them also.

"LOOKING AT HIM, I PONDERED FOR SOME TIME AS TO WHETHER I OUGHT TO SUGGEST THAT HE JOIN US."

Ivan Pushchin. "Notes on Pushkin"[1]

Ivan Pushchin (1798-1859) was a member of the Union of Welfare and a friend of the great poet, Pushkin ("My first friend,

my friend beyond price", Pushkin wrote of him). Pushchin was the leader of the Moscow branch of the Northern Society, and in 1823 he accepted the poet Kondratii Ryleyev into the Secret Society. Together with Ryleyev he elaborated the plan for the insurrection of 14 December, and was among the insurgents. "Took part in the plot to kill the tsar ... took part in the leadership of the [Secret.—*Comp.*] Society, accepted other members and gave instructions, personally acted in the mutiny and stirred lower ranks", reads the judgement of the court as regards the "crimes" of Ivan Pushchin. The Supreme Criminal Court sentenced him to death, which was later commuted to penal servitude for life.

My meeting with Pushkin in our new undertaking had its own portentious significance. While he was resting and relaxing at Mikhailovskoye, I had already joined the Secret Society; thus did circumstances dispose of my fate! While I was still in Lyceum uniform, I was a frequent guest of the club[2] made up of the Muravyovs (Alexander and Mikhail), Burtsov, Pavel Koloshin and Semyonov.* Koloshin was a relative of mine. Our constant conversations on social issues, on the evil of the order of things existing in our country and the possibility of the change that many secretly desired, created unusually close bonds between myself and this club of serious young men: I became friends with them, almost lived with them. Burtsov, to whom I spoke most freely of all, was of the opinion that, in view of the opinions and convictions which I brought with me from the Lyceum, I was ready for the cause. On this basis he accepted me into the Society together with Volkhovsky who, having served in the General Staff of the Guards, had become his service colleague. Burtsov immediately came to know him, to understand and appreciate him.

This elevated aim of life, by its very mysteriousness and indication of new obligations, made a sharp and profound impression on my spirit—it was as if I had suddenly been given special significance in my own eyes: I began to look at life more attentively in all its manifestations of passionate youth, to observe myself as a particle which, although of little importance, nonetheless formed a part of that whole which, sooner or later, must have its beneficient action.

My first thought was—to tell all to Pushkin: his ideas always agreed with mine on public matters (*res publica*), he preached our message in his own way, both orally

* Later members of the Union of Welfare.

and in writing, in verse and prose. I do not know whether it was good or ill-fortune that he was not then in St Petersburg, for I cannot affirm that I would not, in the first burst of enthusiasm and out of my exceptional feelings of friendship towards him, drawn him after me. Subsequently, when I thought of doing this, I was already unable to decide to entrust the secret to him, for it was not my secret alone, and the least incaution could be fatal for the whole cause. The mobility of his fiery character, his association with unreliable people made me nervous. Moreover, in 1818, when a part of the Guards was in Moscow on the occasion of the arrival of the King of Prussia, the actions of one member of the Society were so rash that the need was recognised to select with particular severity, and a few years later it was even declared that the Society had been dissolved in order to exclude those whose membership was an unfortunate error. For this reason I brought into the Society only Ryleyev, even though I was always surrounded by many who shared my way of thinking.

Pushkin, on seeing me after our first separation, naturally noticed a certain change and began to suspect that I was hiding something from him. Particularly during his illness and lengthy convalescence, when we saw each other more frequently than usual, he beseiged me with questions and enquiries which I countered as best I could, reassuring him by saying that he personally, without any society such as he was imagining, was doing all that possibly could be done for the noble purpose: at the time his "Village", "Ode to Freedom", and "Hurrah! The roving despot comes riding into Russia..." and many other little items of a similar kind were being passed from hand to hand, copied out and recited by heart. There was not a living soul who did not know his poetry.[3]

Then there were his various little escapades which occurred everywhere: once, for example, in Tsarskoye Selo,[4] a bear cub broke free of the chain tying it to a post where it had its kennel, and ran into the garden, where it could have encountered, face to face in the dark avenue, the emperor, had his little dog Sharlo not started, thus averting this dangerous meeting. The bear cub was, needless to say, immediately eliminated, and Pushkin, on hearing of this incident, declared without pausing to reflect: "One good man was found, but even that turned out to be a bear!" Similarly he once

cried out in the theatre: "Now is the least dangerous time—ice is floating down the Neva." In other words, there is no need to fear the Fortress.

Of course, such chatter is nothing; but this nothing, akin to taunts, was passed on by word of mouth and gave rise to various rumours which later developed; thus even here that goal was being attained which he unwittingly assisted...

Pushkin's strongest attack on me concerning the Society was when he met me at N. Turgenev's where there was a gathering of all those who wished to take part in the proposed publication of a political journal. Kunitsyn[4] and our Lyceum friend Maslov were also there. We were sitting in a circle round a large table. Maslov was reading an article on statistics. I felt someone behind take me by the shoulder... I looked round—it was Pushkin! "What are you doing here? At last I've caught you red-handed," he whispered in my ear and then moved on. The reading ended. We stood up. I went over to Pushkin and said hello. Tea was served, we lit up a cigar and sat down in a corner.

"Why did you never tell me that you are acquainted with Nikolai [Turgenev.—*Comp.*]? Is it true that this is a gathering of your Society? It's purely by chance that I happened to drop in while I was strolling round the Summer Gardens. Please, stop being so secretive: that's most unworthy of you, my dear friend!"

That time it was easy for me to prove to him, without any great deception, that this was not a gathering of the Society that he sought, that he could ask Maslov, and that I myself was there quite unexpectedly. "You know, Pushkin, that I am no literary man, and you are no doubt surprised that I should somehow be collaborating on a journal. However, it's all very simple, as you shall see for yourself. Nikolai Turgenev called to see me a few days ago; we spoke of the need for and benefit to be gained from a publication that would be as independent as possible; that was the idea that then dominated his mind. He saw that I had Mme Staël: *Considération sur la Révolution française*, which had only just come out, and advised me to try to write something about it and taken from it. He then invited me to come that evening to his house—and here I am."

I do not know to what extent this explanation, which was completely true, satisfied Pushkin, but the conversation then changed and we joined in with the others.

Looking at him, I pondered for some time as to whether I ought to suggest that he join us. He could then decide whether to accept or reject my proposal. But then a question unavoidably presented itself: why, with the exception of myself, had none of the senior members of the Society who were among his close acquaintances thought to ask him? That meant that they held back for virtually the same reasons as I: his opinions were well-known, but there was a lack of complete confidence in him.

Haunted by the thought that I was keeping a secret from Pushkin, and that, perhaps, I was thereby depriving the Society of a useful member, I almost resolved to rush up to him and tell him everything, closing my eyes on the possible consequences... I suffered for him, and sometimes it seemed to me again that perhaps the Secret Society, by its mysterious mark, would help him to examine himself more attentively and severely, and to make some changes in his eccentric way of life. I knew that he sometimes grieved over his blunders, revealed them in our intimate and frank conversations, but, so it seemed, the time had not yet come for his restless nature to calm itself. However much I pondered this in my mind and heart, it ended with my recognising that I did not have the right to act according to my own personal and unreliable opinion, without total conviction, in a matter of such responsibility as regards the aim of the Society itself.

Our circle of acquaintances was totally different.

Thereafter we did not meet very often. Pushkin moved in high society, and I was as far as possible removed from it. That summer manoeuvres and other army occupations took me from St Petersburg. However, none of this prevented us from meeting whenever this was possible, friends as before, and rejoicing at meetings with friends from the Lyceum, of whom only a few now remained in St Petersburg; most of my meetings with Pushkin took place at Delvig's,[6] who was a man who liked nothing better than to sit at home.

In 1824 they had just learned in Moscow that Pushkin had been sent from Odessa to the Pskov village belonging to his father, under the surveillance of the local authorities.[7] All of us, saddened by this reliable information, immediately propounded a thousand and one possible explanations. Knowing nothing for certain, this exile was ascribed to some dispute between him and

Count Vorontsov.[8] There were various rumours and arguments which even involved the Countess in the affair. None of this brought us any comfort. Shortly after it was said that Pushkin had also been placed under the observation of the Archimandrite of the Svyatogorsky Monastery, four versts from Mikhailovskoye. This additional piece of information made the situation more rather than less difficult to resolve.

From the moment when I learned that Pushkin was in exile, I decided I must visit him. As I was preparing to go to St Petersburg to spend Christmas with my family, I proposed to travel out to Pskov to see my sister, who was married to Nabokov, then the commander of the division quartered in Pskov. From there it was just a step to Mikhailovskoye. I therefore put in a request for 28 days leave to go to St Petersburg and Pskov gubernias.

Having celebrated the holiday with my father in St Petersburg, I set off for Pskov after Twelfth-day. I spent a few days at my sister's, then, taking three bottles of Cliquot, I departed, drawing near to my destination early the following morning. At last we turned off from the road, drove through the forest along a hilly track—none of it seemed to pass quickly enough! Driving down the slope, not far from the estate, which was hidden from view by the dense fir trees, our sleigh was so violently hurled to one side by a pothole that the coach-man was thrown out. Alexei,* my invariable companion from the threshold of the Lyceum to the gates of the fortress, and myself managed to keep our seats and seize hold of the reins.

The horses pulled us through drifts of snow, there was no danger: they could not charge off to one side as there was forest all around and they were in snow up to the belly. Once again we were going uphill along a twisting path; suddenly there was a sharp bend, and we unexpectedly drove at full speed through unlocked gates to the jangle of the horses' bells. We lacked the strength to stop the horses at the porch, but were dragged on and came to a halt in the snow of the unswept courtyard...

I looked about me; I saw Pushkin on the porch, barefoot, wearing only a nightshirt, his hands raised above his head. I need not say how I felt at that moment. I lept from the sleigh, seized hold of him and dragged him inside. Outside it was dreadfully cold, but there are mo-

* Pushchin's servant.

ments when a man does not take a chill. We looked at each other, kissed each other, fell silent...

It was about eight o'clock in the morning. I don't remember clearly what happened. An old lady who came running in found us embracing each other just as we had been on coming into the house—one almost naked, the other covered in snow. Finally tears came (even now, thirty years later, they make it difficult for me to write wearing glasses), and we realised where we were. I felt rather guilty before the woman, but she understood perfectly. I do not know who she thought I was, but, without asking, she threw her arms around me. I immediately guessed that it was his kindly nanny[9] whose praises he had so often sung—I almost stifled her in my embrace.

All of this took place in a very small area. Alexander's room was by the porch, with a window looking out onto the yard through which he had seen me on hearing the bell. In this small room there was a bed with a canapy, a writing desk, a book-case, etc., etc. Everywhere there was poetic disorder, everywhere there were sheets of paper covered with writing, chewed and burnt pieces of quills (he always, from his days at the Lyceum, wrote with stubs which he barely managed to hold between his fingers). The entrance into his room was directly from the courtyard; opposite his door was the door into his nanny's room, where there stood a number of embroidery frames...

On the whole, Pushkin seemed to me to be a little more serious than formerly, retaining, however, that same cheeriness; perhaps it was his very position which produced that impression on me. He was as happy as a child at our meeting, repeating several times that he could not believe that we were together again. His old animation was evident in everything, in every word, in all the recollections: they returned ceaselessly in the course of our chatter. In appearance he had changed but little, having only grown side-whiskers; I found that he was then very similar to the portrait which I later saw in *Severniye Tsvety* (Northern Flowers), and now in an edition of his essays published by Annenkov...[10]

Imperceptively we once more touched upon his suspicions regarding the Society. When I said to him that I was not alone in entering upon this new service to the fatherland, he leapt from his chair and cried: "All this is certainly connected with Major Rayevsky, who has been held for five years now in the fortress, and who

has revealed nothing."[11] Then, calming down, he continued: "However, I'm not trying to force you to speak, my dear Pushchin. Perhaps you are right not to trust me. Certainly I do not deserve such trust—by reason of many follies." Without saying a word I heartily embraced him, and then we went out for a walk: both of us felt the need for fresh air...

I had brought Pushkin a copy of *Wit Works Woe*[12] as a present, and he was very satisfied with this comedy, still in manuscript form and unknown to him until that moment. After dinner, over a cup of coffee, he began to read it aloud; but once again I must regret that I cannot recall any of his apt comments, of which, incidentally, some subsequently appeared in print.

While Pushkin was reading, someone drove up to the porch. Pushkin looked out of the window, appeared confused and hastily opened the *Chetyi-Minei*[13] lying on the table. Noticing his discomfiture but not suspecting the reason, I asked him what the cause might be. He did not have time to answer before a small, fair-haired monk entered the room and introduced himself as the superior of the nearby monastery.

I went up for his blessing, as did Pushkin, who also requested him to be seated... The monk began to excuse himself for having possibly disturbed us, then he said that, on hearing my surname, he had thought to find a certain P. Pushchin ... an acquaintance whom he had not seen for a long time. It was evident that my arrival had been reported to the superior and that the monk was seeking to conceal this fact.

Although this visit was most inconvenient, I nonetheless wished to "faire bonne mine a mauvais jeu" and tried to convince him to the contrary: I explained to him that I—Pushchin such and such—was a Lyceum friend of our host, and that General Pushchin, his acquaintance, was the commander of the brigade quartered in Kishinev, where I had met him in 1820. Our conversation touched on this and that. In the meantime tea was served. Pushkin asked for some rum; to which, it appeared, the monk was partial. He drank two glasses of tea, not forgetting the rum, and then began to say his farewells, excusing himself yet again for having interrupted our friendly talk.

I was happy that we were free of our guest, but I felt uncomfortable on Pushkin's behalf: he had grown as docile as a schoolboy at the appearance of the superior.

I told him how I regretted having caused this visit. "Stop this, my dear friend! He comes to see me without that, I have been placed under his surveillance. What can I say about such rubbish!" And with that he continued to read the play as if nothing had happened; I listened with extraordinary pleasure to his expressive and emotional reading glad to have been able to give him such great happiness. Then he read out to me something of his own composition, for the most part in extracts which were later included in his marvellous plays; he read outloud the beginning of his poem "The Gypsies" for the *Polyarnaya Zvezda*, and requested me to embrace Ryleyev for him and thank him for his patriotic *Reflections*.

By this time it was already past midnight. Supper was served; the third cork popped to mark our farewell. We embraced in the hope of perhaps meeting shortly in Moscow. This dubious hope made parting easier after such a joyous day. The sleigh-driver had already harnessed the horses, the bell rang at the porch, the clock struck three. We clinked glasses once again, but the drink was cheerless: it was as if we felt that this was the last drink we could have together, and that we were drinking to our permanent separation! Silently I threw my fur coat over my shoulders and ran out to the sleigh. Pushkin called out after me; not hearing what he said I looked at him: he was standing on the porch with a candle in his hand. The horses galloped downhill. I heard: "Farewell, friend!" The gates creaked behind me...

The scene changed.

I was convicted. In 1828, on 5 January, I was brought from Schliesselburg to Chita, where I was at last reunited with my fellow-exiles and fellow-prisoners who had already arrived before me at this Siberian camp...

In our unusual prison I affectionately followed the gradual literary development of Pushkin; we drew pleasure from all his published works, for we received almost all the periodical journals. In letters from my relatives and from Engelgardt,[14] who was able to locate me even beyond lake Baikal, I more than once received information about him...

Subsequently I heard of his marriage and his appointment to the post of court page;[15] I found it difficult to accept either of these events: I was unable to imagine Pushkin as a family man and a courtier; a beautiful

wife and court service made me afraid for him. Taken together, as far as I understood him, they did not promise his happiness.

The years passed, nothing happened to cheer our remote habitation—there, on our west, everything continued its weary course. We sinners, stood like milestones along a highway; other travellers, perhaps, occasionally glanced at us, but continued on their way at the same pace and in the same direction...

In the meantime, by the very force of circumstances, we came to have bolder illicit contacts with European Russia—sometimes news not only from the papers reached us. Thus, in January 1837[16] our sergeant-major, Rosenberg, called in on me in my room No. 14 on returning from his leave. I was truly happy to see him and besieged him with questions about relatives and friends whom he had happened to see in St Petersburg. Answering my questions, he referred somewhat uncertainly to Pushkin. I immediately seized upon this name, so dear to me: where had he met him? how was he? etc. Rosenberg listened to me rather pensively and said at last: "There's no point in keeping it from you. Your friend is no longer! He was wounded in a duel with Dantes and died two days later; I was present at the funeral service in the Koniushennaya Church on the eve of my departure from St Petersburg."

On hearing this tragic story it was as if, to begin with, I did not hear what the man was saying, so far was I from being able to believe that Pushkin could die in his prime, amidst all the hopes placed on him. It was like a bolt from the blue—I was thunderstruck, and my heart did not immediately feel the full weight of grief. The news passed like an electric spark around the prison—everywhere everyone spoke only of the death of Pushkin—of our general loss; but in the end it all led only to the conclusion that he had indeed died irreversibly!

Such was the disposition of providence; we could only bow our heads before its decision. I will not talk now about that national grief which then struck me with indescribable force: it is too closely bound up with the malicious insults which must inexpressibly have accompanied Pushkin in his last months. Others know better than I—so far away—the base circumstances that gave rise to the duel; for my part I will say only that I could not hear of them without particular revulsion, I was in-

dignant at those who had been, or were suspected of having been, involved in this despicable affair,[17] which had cut short the existence of one of the greatest poets.

Thinking then, as I often do now, about the early death of my friend, I have asked myself more than once: "What would have happened to Pushkin if I had drawn him into our Union, and if he had to experience a life totally different from the one that was his lot?"

A bold question, but I can be forgiven for it! You have seen the inner battle I waged each time that, seeing his pliable willingness, I thought of accepting him as a member of our Society; you have seen that his fate already hung almost by a hair when I accidentally met with his father.[18] That meaningless, totally insignificant meeting nonetheless echoed inside me like a portent... It was only after his death that all these, no doubt trivial circumstances assumed in my eyes the appearance of a deliberate design which, by saving him from our fate, preserved him for the glory of Russia.

It is certain that life in Siberia, the life to which we were later condemned for thirty years, if it had not entirely consumed his great talent, would not have given him the possibility of attaining that development which, unfortunately, in another sphere of life, was prematurely interrupted.

A characteristic feature of Pushkin's genius was his diversity. There was almost no natural phenomenon, no event in daily social life which passed him by without evoking the wonderful and inimitable notes of his muse; and therefore space and freedom, invaluable for any man, were for him also the most potent sources of inspiration. In our narrow suffocating imprisonment the sights of nature could be seen only through prison bars, while the life passing beyond could only be heard.

Pushkin, despite his impressionability, would not have found there material to use in his professional career. Perhaps such a violent change, which far from all can survive, would have acted fatally upon his singular, not to say capricious, nature.

In short, in moments of sorrow I consoled myself with the thought that a poet never dies, and that my Pushkin would always live for those who, like myself, loved him, and for all those who are able to find him living in his immortal works...

FROM "A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS SECRET SOCIETIES WHOSE REAL OR FICTITIOUS EXISTENCE WAS DISCOVERED BY THE COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY[1] "

The Society of Associated Slavs

Artillery Second Lieutenant Borisov-2[2] having persuaded thereunto his brother, artillery Second Lieutenant Borisov-1 and Lublinski, a Polish gentleman from Volyn Gubernia,* founded in 1823 the Society of Associated Slavs. The aim of their Society was the creation of a general union with a uniform republican government, but without infringement of the independence of each, of the eight Slav tribes: i.e. Russia, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Hungary with Transylvania, Serbia with Moldavia and Wallachia;[3] the construction of four ports on the four seas surrounding these lands, i.e. on the Black, the White, the Dalmatian[4] and the Arctic; the establishment, in the centre of these eight lands, of a main city. The rules of the Society were set out in the Oath and in the short Slavic Catechism[5] composed by Borisov and translated into Polish by Lublinski... They in no way possessed the means for attaining their undertaking, and contented themselves solely with spreading their Society by multiplying the number of members, who had to contribute one tenth of their income for the common use. However, they numbered no more than 36, all young officers from the artillery and infantry regiments of the 3rd Corps, with the exception of a few residents of Volyn, where the Borisovs were quartered. This was the position of the Society of Associated Slavs in 1825, when Bestuzhev-Riumin, an active member of the Southern Society, discovered its existence while the troops of the 3rd Corps were out on excercises near the village of Leshchina. He soon succeeded in converting the Slavs to his aim and, having united them with his Society, received from most of them the pledge to assist him and obey him unquestioningly. From that time on the Slav Society, led by Bestuzhev-Riumin, shared all his ideas and plans regarding the overthrow of the throne and the whole of the existing order in Russia, and even planned to make an attempt on the life of the then emperor...

* Volyn Gubernia—part of western Ukraine.

"THE SOCIETY WAS CREATED. ITS AIM WAS THE ASSOCIATION OF THE SLAV TRIBES."

Pyotr Borisov on the Emergence of the Society of Associated Slavs. From His Testimony Before the Committee of Enquiry[1]

"The creation of the Society of Slavs is a remarkable phenomenon. It shows how great was the need for secret societies. Borisov was a man without any education, but with a great desire to educate himself. When he was with his battery [artillery.—*Comp.*] in Poland, he was billeted in the home of a landowner who had a huge library composed, for the most part [of works.—*Comp.*] by writers of the 18th century. He taught himself French and read all the French books. Before the Committee of Enquiry and later, in exile in Siberia, he said that, when he was on leave in St Petersburg, another officer was staying in the same hotel as himself; they came to know each other; that officer, on leaving St Petersburg, called in to say farewell to Borisov. When the officer, whose name he does not remember, had left, he found an excercise-book on his table with the statutes of a secret society which greatly impressed him, and he immediately began to gather members. The effect of his stay in Poland revealed itself. The aim of the Society of Slavs was not the abolition of despotism in Russia [that is, not so much the liberation of Russia from despotism.—*Comp.*], but the liberation of all Slavs from despotism; in the statutes one can also see the influence of writers of the 18th century, they speak of the foundation of a city in which the Slavs will seat the goddess of enlightenment upon the throne. The Associated Slavs were, for the most part, people of no education, but of unwavering convictions, they were prepared to undertake anything in the name of those convictions. It is a great pity that little is known about Borisov (and about the Society of Slavs in general), but what is known evokes great sympathy. For two years the Society of Slavs existed quite separately from other societies, and was even unaware of their existence. It was only in 1825 that Bestuzhev-Riumin, wholly by accident, learned about this society and proposed that it join with the Southern Society, which proposal was accepted. When, at last, the time came to act, the Slavs showed that they were more capable of action than all the other members."

(From the article "Comments on the Notes of A. Muravyov" by Yevgenii Yakushkin, son of the Decembrist Ivan Yakushkin)

...I first invited [cadet.—*Comp.*] Volkov, with whom I lived on good terms, to form a Secret Society. That was

in 1818, on 13 May... The aim of our Society was at first, only the rules of the Pythagorean sect:[2] self-improvement in science, the arts and virtue, love and friendship. Even now one can find in my papers the emblem I devised for this society—two hands clasped together over an altar, with the inscription "La gloire, l'amour et l'amitié" [Glory, Love and Friendship.—*Comp.*]. It was known as the Society of the First Agreement, then to the first aim we added improvement in morality and the purification of religion from prejudice. Finally I convinced Volkov and my brother[3] who opposed me in this, to add to the first aim the creation of the famous Republic of the philosopher Plato,[4] persuaded them to take the name of the Friends of Nature, wrote the greater part of the rules, the oath and the statutes of this society, and took as its emblem the sun rising from behind a mountain range and dispersing with its rays the clouds gathered over their peaks, together with the inscription "I will arise and disperse darkness". However, shortly after our promotion [to officers.—*Comp.*] all this was abandoned. The little excercise-book which contained all that I have referred to above, written in my own hand, was burned by my brother, but the drawings, also my work, somehow survived among his papers...

Following the collapse of the society of the Friends of Nature, I often talked to my brother about how it might be revived. Various disappointments had made my brother dissatisfied with the government. From my childhood I had been in love with democracy, and very often, when we still lived at home my brother would argue with me over my Greeks and Romans. He did not like my political opinions, he was an opponent of popular power, but in 1823 our views came to be almost identical, and we proposed to create a society, the aim of which would be (when its members had increased significantly) to require that the sovereign introduce positive laws to which he himself would also be subject. A moderate monarchy engaged my brothers thoughts, and I, in order to avoid argument, agreed with him as I had before, contrary to my heart.

On making the acquaintance of the Pole Lublinski[5] I suggested to my brother that we reveal to him, Lublinski, our intentions and ask for his advice. He agreed, and the Society was created. Its aim was the association of the Slav tribes. Neither my brother nor Lublinski

took part in composing the Oath and the Catechism. This was my work... Lublinski, at my request, merely translated the Catechism and the Oath into Polish. The Federal Union of the Slav Generations, similar to that of Greece,[6] but far improved upon it, was my plan. It was I who, in 1825, persuaded the Slavs to call meetings, and I intended, at the first of such meetings, to suggest that those of the members who owned peasants should allow them to purchase their freedom, and those who did not have any peasants would undertake to contribute a certain amount of money so that serfs could be purchased from masters, who abused them, and then set free...

The Friends of Nature had taken their oath on the New Testament—this had been my brother's suggestion. The Slavs swore their oath on a sword. This invention [suggestion.—*Comp.*] belongs to me, the sword inspired more enthusiasm and seemed to be more in keeping with the spirit of the Society.

When my brother retired from the army at the beginning of 1824, all the Slavs depended to a certain extent on myself, but I did all I could to place myself on a level with them, and not to demand anything insistently; in order to arouse them to act on behalf of the Society I stirred their enthusiasm warming their passions by various means. I did not write to my brother about my actions, fearing to be discovered by the government.

In 1825, I do not recall the exact date in August, when our brigade went on exercises just outside the little village of Leshchina, I saw Tiutchev,[7] who told me about the existence of the Southern Society, of which Lieutenant-Colonel Muravyov-Apostol and Bestuzhev-Riumin, with whom he undertook to acquaint me, were members. At first, not knowing that the membership of this Society was very large, nor its aim, I thought of suggesting that it join with the Slav Union about which I spoke to Ivanov and Gorbachevsky, but later, having learned about it in detail and aware of the smallness and weakness of my Society, I could not produce any objection to the proposal that Bestuzhev-Riumin put before myself and Gorbachevsky, which was that we united with them. Although some of the members were not altogether in agreement with this, "your aim", he said to us, "is very diversified, and therefore it is unlikely that it will ever be attained, and moreover it is more fitting to think about our own compatriots than

about foreigners", I and my colleagues were convinced.

In September of that same year, Bestuzhev-Riumin informed us, when the first meeting was held at my apartment in Leshchina, that the aim of the Society was the introduction into Russia of a constitution, and that he wanted to acquaint us with an extract from it...

Muravyov-Apostol and Bestuzhev-Riumin told us that the revolution would be a military one, that they were hoping to bring it about without any bloodshed whatever because the peasants oppressed by their landlords and burdened with taxes, the soldiers abused by their commanders, the officers and the impoverished nobility would take our side at the first sign, and we would nowhere meet opposition.

All our talks touched upon the single theme of the need for change. They told us that we should seek to inspire in our soldiers love for and confidence in ourselves, and to encourage them in their despondency with the hope of rapid change, and also that we should infuse our colleagues with our ideas and incline them, though with the greatest caution, to enter the Southern Society.

"ALL THEIR THOUGHTS WERE ON THE UNDERTAKING TO LIBERATE THE FATHERLAND."

Ivan Gorbachevsky. "On the Unification of the Society of Associated Slavs with the Southern Society"[1]

Ivan Gorbachevsky (1800-1869), the son of a nobleman who had no estate and was of modest means, was a second lieutenant in the artillery. In 1823 he was accepted by Pyotr Borisov into the Society of Associated Slavs and became an active member. "Planning to assassinate the tsar, he pledged with an oath to carry through this evil deed and appointed [to this end.—*Comp.*] others, took part in the direction of the Secret Society, incited and persuaded subordinate members to rebellion, and swore to bring about rebellion, sought to spread the society by the acceptance [into it.—*Comp.*] of members, and incited subordinate ranks to mutiny."—such was the list of "crimes" recorded in the sentence of the court on Gorbachevsky. Gorbachevsky was included in the first category of "criminals" and condemned to death "by decapitation". The tsar's official confirmation commuted this sentence to penal servitude for life.

Gorbachevsky left behind valuable reminiscences on the Society of Associated Slavs and on the insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment.

On the 3rd or 4th of September [1825.—*Comp.*] a large number of the members of the Slav Society gathered at the appointed place and, while awaiting the arrival of the members of the Southern Society, discussed once again the proposal to unite the two societies; however, the idea of an unconditional unification was already beginning to win the minds of the Slavs, whose desire to act was becoming an indomitable passion.

The arrival of Bestuzhev [-Riumin.—*Comp.*] brought these discussions to an end. "Important affairs," he said after the usual greetings, "have prevented Muravyov [-Apostol.—*Comp.*] from keeping his promise, but he has entrusted me with the task of concluding our mutual business. I am to tell you of the plans and aims of the Southern Society, and propose that the Slav Society unite with it." Then he began to speak about the strength of his society, of its direction by the Supreme Duma, of the readiness in Moscow and St Petersburg to begin the revolution, of the participation in these plans of the 2nd Army, the Guards Corps and many regiments of the 3rd and 4th corps. From his words it was clear that the constitution, which involved forms of republican government for Russia and which had received the approval of many renowned publicists, English, French and German,[2] had been unanimously adopted by the members of the Southern Society. Bestuzhev promised to deliver a copy of the constitution immediately, to explain the aim, methods and administration of this Society and, upon final unification, to give the names of the main members; he informed us that the rules of the Society forbade him to reveal the location of the Supreme Duma and the members of which it was composed. These unsatisfactory answers caused the majority of the Slavs to hesitate; doubt crept into the hearts of many; proof was demanded, objections were made—in a word, both sides expected mutual trust, but no one was willing to be the first to speak frankly. Bestuzhev deferred further explanations till another time, hoping that time would not cool but further intensify the force of feeling, and in this he was not mistaken. On the morning of the next day he gave Pestov[3] a copy of an extract[4] from the *Russkaya Pravda* and requested him to communicate it to all the Slavs. That same day several copies were made of this extract, and by evening the future form of Russian government was already known to all the Slavs. On the evening of that same day, Gorbachevsky and Borisov-2

[Pyotr Borisov.—*Comp.*] met with Muravyov,[5] who confirmed all that Bestuzhev had said and asked them to meet again and conclude as quickly as possible the business of the unification of the two societies.

In the course of the two or three days following the first conference, all the Slavs, except for the officers of the Chernigovsky Regiment, met at the apartment of Second Lieutenant Andreyevich. The meeting was well attended. Bestuzhev came, together with Tiutchev, and the discussion began with a demand for confidence in the Supreme Duma; in the name of love for the Fatherland the Slavs were asked to unite with the Southern Society without further explanations on its part. Loud murmurings and expressions of dissatisfaction were their answer. "We need evidence, we demand a full explanation," shouted out some of the members. Bestuzhev began to describe in outline the government of the Southern Society, spoke of various boards existing in different places in Russia, of the nature of their relationship to the Supreme Duma, of the strength of his Society, named its members: Prince Volkonsky, Prince Trubetskoy, General Rayevsky, General Orlov, General Kiselyov, Yushnevsky, Pestel, Davydov, Tisengausen, Povalo-Shveikovsky, Alexander and Artamon Myravyov, Frolov, Pykhachev, Vranitsky, Gabbe, Nabokov and many other staff and ranking officers from various corps, divisions and regiments.[6] "All these noble people," he said in conclusion, "forgetful of honours and wealth, have pledged to free Russia from shameful slavery and are ready to die for the good of their Fatherland."

Seeing that his words had produced a profound impression on the minds of the Slavs, he added that the large Polish society,[7] whose members were dispersed not only throughout the Kingdom of Poland and gubernias incorporated into Russia, but also in Galitia and the province of Poznan,[8] was prepared to share with the Russians the danger of a revolution and to assist it with all its strength and ability: that it had already united with the Southern Society, and that relations between the two societies had been entrusted, on the Polish side, to Prince Jablonowski, Count Moszynski and Colonel Kryżanowski,[9] and on the Russian side, to Sergei Muravyov and himself, Bestuzhev-Riumin. He then immediately went on to state that signs of the existence of a secret society had been discovered among the officers of the Lithuanian Corps,[10] and that Povalo-Shveikovsky had been given the task of

establishing contact with its members and, in particular, of influencing that corps.

The frankness of Bestuzhev captivated the Slavs; only a few were able to resist the general enthusiasm; willingness to unite with a society of well-intentioned people who had pledged to die for the good of the Fatherland expressed itself in their eyes, in their gestures; each demanded that the business be concluded as quickly as possible. Only Borisov-2 and a few of the Slavs attending the meeting found it impossible to agree to the unconditional unification of the two societies. According to Borisov-2, the Slavs, who had pledged to dedicate their lives to the liberation of the Slav tribes, to the elimination of the enmity that existed between some of them, and the establishment of freedom, equality and fraternal love, did not have the right to violate these obligations. This violation would bring with it universal reproach and troubled conscience. "And furthermore, having subordinated ourselves unconditionally to the Supreme Duma of the Southern Society," he continued, "will we be in a position to fulfill exactly the obligations we undertook? Will not our subordination subject us to the arbitrary will of this mysterious Duma which, perhaps, will find the noble aim of the Slav Union of little importance, and, sacrificing future for present benefits, forbid us to have relations with other peoples abroad?" Bestuzhev-Riumin made every effort to refute these objections; he argued that the transformation of Russia would inevitably open up for all Slav tribes the road to freedom and prosperity; that the united societies could more conveniently bring about this transformation; that Russia, liberated from tyranny, would be open to the aim of the Slav Union: to liberate Poland, Bohemia, Moravia and other Slav lands, to establish in them free governments, and unite all in a federal union. "Thus," he said, "our unification will not only not separate you from that aim, but, on the contrary, will bring you closer to it."

Bestuzhev-Riumin's enthusiasm came close to exaltation; his confidence in the success of the undertaking breathed into the heart of each unquestioned hope in a happy future. He triumphed over the cold scepticism of Borisov-2, who had expected success from the efforts of the intellect alone, and who ascribed all to unwavering human will. The thought of the strength of the Southern Society, the desire to see in their own lifetime the liberation of their Fatherland and other Slav peoples,

wholly captivated the Slavs. In the general fire of their noble passions they agreed to unite immediately with the Southern Society, to share with it difficulties and danger for the good of their native land, and from that moment on to consider the aim, rules and methods adopted by that society as their own. Thus the two societies united definitively; the fate of the Slavs was decided. From that time on, the Slav Union existed only in the thoughts and hearts of a few, who could not forget the elevated and noble, although perhaps, in the opinion of some, utopian idea of a federate union of the Slav peoples.

Having received from the Slavs their agreement to a union with the Southern Society, Bestuzhev-Riumin proposed that they elect from their number an intermediary and create a separate board. "The elected intermediary," he said, "must take charge of the business of the board and communicate everything either to me or to S. Muravyov; we undertake, for our part, to deliver to him the instructions of the Supreme Duma and to inform him of all the business of the Society; the Slavs may only accept new members with the permission of the intermediary, who must, at least once a year, report to the Supreme Duma on the propagation and the affairs of the Slav Board." Bestuzhev-Riumin continued: "The Southern Society is already so strong that it does not even require new members. Therefore it would be better if the Slavs were to engage in gradual, cautious and slow preparation of the soldiers. They may also accept officers into the Society if they find such as are worthy of this honour." As regards civil servants, he was altogether of the opposite opinion: in his eyes these people were not only useless, but even harmful; the transformation of Russia was to be the consequence of a purely military revolution...

On 13 September, on the day appointed for the final meeting, all the members of the Slav Society hastened to gather at the apartment of Andreyevich-2. This meeting was attended by a large number of people and presented a curious spectacle for the observer. People of differing characters, moved by differing passions, apparently thought only of how they might merge into one desire and compose one whole; all their thoughts were on the undertaking to liberate the Fatherland; all their hopes were overshadowed by the hope of brilliant and unquestioned success. Joy and dedication shone on their faces...

The arrival of Bestuzhev-Riumin brought their rapture to its peak. He once more spoke about success, about the happiness of sacrificing oneself for the good of one's compatriots, after which each wished to take there and then the required oath. All swore passionately to appear at the first sign at the appointed place with weapons in their hands, to use every means to draw in their subordinates, to act with dedication and selflessness. Bestuzhev-Riumin, removing the small icon hanging on his breast, kissed it passionately, calling upon providence to aid them; with tremendous feeling he pronounced the oath to die for freedom, and passed the icon to the Slavs standing close to him. It is impossible to describe the solemnity of this moving yet strange scene. The inflamed imagination, the flow of stormy, indomitable passions brought unceasing exclamations. The sincere, solemn and awesome oaths mixed with cries: Long Live the Constitution! Long Live the Republic! Long Live the People! An End to the Distinction of Social Estates! An End to Aristocracy and Tsardom!...

The icon passed from hand to hand: the Slavs kissed it passionately, embraced each other with burning tears in their eyes, rejoiced like children—in a word, this meeting resembled a gathering of frenzied people who considered death to be the supreme good, sought and demanded it. Bestuzhev-Riumin, amazed and moved by these feelings, by this stormy surge of enthusiasm, or, wishing, perhaps, to inflame the passions of the Slavs still further with the hope of a better future, said with tears in his eyes: "You are wrong to think that a glorious death is the sole aim of your life; the Fatherland is always grateful; it generously rewards its loyal sons; the reward of your selflessness will be not death, but honours and dignity; you are still young and it is not a martyr's death that awaits you, but the crown of glory and happiness." These words, like the sacred rod of Endor,[11] in a single moment changed the scene; the noisy exclamations ceased, indignation took the place of rapture.

"Your talk of rewards," many exclaimed, "is an affront to us!"

"It is not for rewards, not for honours that we want to liberate Russia," said others.

"To fight to our last drop of blood—that is our reward!" some shouted furiously.

Bestuzhev-Riumin, seeing that his reference to rewards was unfortunate, was disconcerted. But this right-

eous indignation passed after he had spoken a few more words; he calmed the Slavs, who once again abandoned themselves to their emotions...

The brief description of these events in the Leshchina camp shows how powerful was the influence of the unification of the two societies on their course of action and future fate...

The Speech Delivered by Bestuzhev-Riumin at a Meeting of the Members of the Society of Associated Slavs, 13 September 1825. From the Testimony of Bestuzhev-Riumin[1]

Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin (1803-1826), a second lieutenant, was one of the leaders of the Vasilkov Board (branch) of the Southern Society, and a friend of Sergei Muravyov-Apostol. Possessed of brilliant organisational abilities and the gift of oratory, Bestuzhev-Riumin played an important role in the activity of the Society: he accepted into it many new members and was involved in the three attempts (in 1823, 1824 and 1825) on the life of Alexander I. In 1825 he entered into negotiations with the Polish Patriotic Society on support for the uprising prepared by the Southern Society; in 1825 he brought about the unification of the Society of Associated Slavs and the Southern Society. Bestuzhev-Riumin, together with Muravyov-Apostol, was actively involved in preparations for the insurrection by the Chernigovsky Regiment, and took part in it (29 December 1825—3 January 1826). He was seized with a weapon in his hand when the insurrection was suppressed, and executed on 13 July 1826.

The age of military glory ended with Napoleon. Now has come the time of the liberation of the nations from the slavery that oppresses them, and is it possible that the Russians, who distinguished themselves with such brilliant exploits in a truly patriotic war, that the Russians, who rescued Europe from the Napoleonic yoke, will not throw off their own yoke, will not distinguish themselves by noble zeal when it comes to the salvation of the Fatherland, the happy transformation of which depends upon our love for freedom? Look at the people and see how they are oppressed. Trade has decayed, there is almost no industry, poverty has reached such a pitch that there is nothing with which to pay not only current taxes, but even taxes still owing from the past. The troops murmur. In these circumstances it was not difficult for our Society to spread and become powerful and menacing. Almost everyone with education either belongs

to it or approves its aim. Many of those whom the government considers to be the most loyal support of the autocracy—that source of all evils—have long been zealously assisting us. Now caution alone obliges people to join the Society, for all those who are noble-minded are disliked by the government—they are suspect, and are in constant danger. The Society, by virtue of its size and strength is their surest refuge. Soon it will embark upon its mission—to liberate Russia and, perhaps, the whole of Europe.

The strivings of all the nations are restrained by the Russian army. As soon as that army proclaims freedom, all the nations will triumph. A great deed will be accomplished, and we will be proclaimed the heroes of the age.

"ON COMMENCING THE REVOLUTION ITSELF, IT WAS NECESSARY TO CARRY IT THROUGH IN ST PETERSBURG."

Pavel Pestel on the Plans for an Armed Uprising and Coup d'Etat. From the Testimony of Pavel Pestel[1]

As regards the time and the manner of carrying through the intentions of the Secret Society there were various opinions and views. The main opinion was as follows: firstly, it was necessary to decide in detail what kind of new government the Society desired, for if this was not resolutely stipulated, then parties and various intrigues could be born; however, this had not yet been done in the Society. Secondly, the Society had to increase its membership to the point such that it would be possible, through the members, to introduce the way of thinking of the Union[2] into public opinion, and convert the intentions of the Union as far as possible into the general desire, so that general opinion should precede revolution; and at the same time, the members of the Union should be spread throughout the state so that, through them, it would be possible not only to thwart all opposition, but even organise support everywhere once the revolution began. The Society was still a long way from such a position in its affairs. For it was still very weak. Thirdly and finally, on commencing the revolution itself, it was necessary to carry it through in St Petersburg, the hub

of all power and government, and our task in the army and the gubernias was to recognise, support and assist St Petersburg. In St Petersburg this could happen by means of an insurrection of the Guards, and also the fleet, the expulsion of the members of the imperial family to foreign parts, with the exception of the late sovereign, the convening of the Senate so as to proclaim through it a new order of things, the charging of the Provisional Administration with the task of introducing this new order, or the convening, through the Senate, of people's deputies to confirm a constitution. If a monarchical government should be chosen, then the Provisional Administration would function as a regent, and Alexander[3] would be recognised emperor.

From the explanation of this plan it is evident that it still required a great deal of time; and therefore to it was added the suggestion that it would be convenient to begin the revolution following the natural death of His Majesty, Emperor Alexander [I.—*Comp.*], but his death was not soon expected by anyone. Moreover, the time to begin was to be determined primarily by circumstances and the strength of the Society, in which case the violent death of the late sovereign might also be necessary; but this only as a last resort, for we would prefer to wait for his natural death, provided the danger of the Society due to its strength and circumstances made it impossible to delay. That is the modus operandi which was discussed most and with which all the members of the Society, both in the Southern and the Northern circuits, were in agreement. If there was another issue over which there was argument, it was solely the manner of introducing the new order: through the Provisional Administration, through a Convention of Deputies, and such like; but all agreed in saying that the revolution could not begin during the life of His Majesty the Emperor, and that it was necessary either to await his death, or resolve to hasten it, as soon as the strength and circumstances of the society might require it. In this all were truly in agreement.

Another proposal was the following: to begin the revolution during the expected imperial review of the troops of the 3rd Corps in 1826. The first act would be the assassination of His Majesty Emperor Alexander. Then would come the publication of two proclamations: one to the troops, one to the people. Then the 3rd Corps would progress to Kiev and Moscow in the hope that

other troops quartered along its route would join it, even without prior contact between them, relying on the general spirit of dissatisfaction. In Moscow a demand would be made to the Senate for the transformation of the state. During all these actions by the 3rd Corps, all the remaining members of the Union were to support the revolution. The rest of the Southern circuit was to occupy Kiev and remain there. The Northern circuit was to bring out the Guards and the navy, transport all the members of the imperial family to other parts, and make the same demand of the Senate as the 3rd Corps. Then they were to wait to see what circumstances rendered necessary as regards further action.

"THE SOVEREIGN KNEW A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE SECRET SOCIETY"

Sergei Volkonsky on Government Surveillance of the Secret Society[1]

Sergei Volkonsky (1788-1865), a major-general, came from an ancient and wealthy princely lineage and had taken part in many wars and battles (beginning in 1805). He was a member of the Union of Welfare and the Southern Society, and one of the leaders of a branch of the latter. During the enquiry, the name of Volkonsky was subject to rigorous secrecy (he was referred to as "Detainee No. 4"), as active participation in a political conspiracy by a famous general and prince who was related to prominent officials and many aristocratic families was, in the eyes of Nicholas I, an extraordinary phenomenon. The Supreme Criminal Court condemned Volkonsky to death. The tsar commuted this to 20 years penal servitude to be followed by permanent exile in Siberia. On returning from exile, Volkonsky met Lev Tolstoi, who at that time had begun work on his novel *The Decembrists* (which remained unfinished), the main hero of which was "a Decembrist returned from exile" (Volkonsky was to be the prototype for this hero).

Half way through 1824, Count Witt, through a chosen agent, the landowner Boshnyak, an intelligent and clever man who assumed the appearance of a progressive in his political opinions, established contact with the Secret Society. Witt, a wily man, had for the most part merely guessed at the existence of a Secret Society, but wished, by the discovery of this Secret Society and

its betrayal, to win the favour of the monarch and thus restore the sovereign's confidence in him, shaken as a result of the intrigues of Arakcheyev, who had information about his financial abuses with respect to the southern military settlement of which he was in charge.

Encouraged by Witt, Boshnyak made the acquaintance of Likharev, a young staff officer at general headquarters and a fiery and incautious man. Knowing of his constant and even family connection with Vasilii Davydov,[2] he intuited or, perhaps it would be better to say, he confidently deduced that he also was a member of the Secret Society. Likharev fell into the trap. Not long afterwards, Boshnyak informed Likharev that Count Witt shared our convictions and that he wished to join our Society, adding that the acquisition of such a figure, in charge of such a vast military force, would be of considerable benefit to the Secret Society, but that Witt, as a man occupying a top-ranking position, could not be openly known as such, even among the members of the Society, and that therefore he, Boshnyak, would be the mediator between Witt and the Southern Duma.[3]

This news was, of course, transmitted to the Tulchin Southern Duma, and the actions of Likharev were reproached [i.e. criticised.—*Comp.*] by both Pestel and Yushnevsky, its chairmen; however, they decided that distrust in Witt should not be openly displayed, but, as the French proverb says, both Boshnyak and Witt held by empty promises, and, as regards accepting Witt into the Secret Society, to try to discourage him, not revealing distrust, but saying that the time had not yet come for positive, open action, but when it was decided, then, fully appreciative of Witt's proposal, he would be accepted with boundless gratitude.

Naturally, neither Witt nor Boshnyak accepted this reply, which was communicated to the latter by Likharev, at its face value, but, as clever and wily people, they showed no distrust, and Boshnyak continued to learn what he wanted and what he could from Likharev...

Besides Witt and Boshnyak there were yet another two traitors—Sherwood and Maiboroda. Sherwood was also an agent of Witt,[4] and this is what I know about him and his activity... A keen-witted individual, he conjectured certain things, and perhaps he had been instructed by Witt to carry out certain observations, and with these conjectures, and used by the clever Witt as a sleuth

in various matters, he was sent to Kharkov to find out a little about the rumour of certain plans in support of the Greek Empire, that is, about a secret confederacy in support of the Greek uprising, in which plans a certain Count Bulgari was involved. I do not know whether he uncovered anything in this matter, but his trip to Kharkov gave him the opportunity to make the acquaintance of Fyodor Vadkovsky, a member of our Society, a fiery, intelligent young man, but too trusting, with whom he came to be on friendly terms. Vadkovsky was transferred from the Cavalierguard Regiment to the army, to the Nezhinsky, as I recall, Dragoon Regiment, for his bold talk, and, it seems, for spreading verse intended to criticise the government and the sovereign, and was embittered by this transfer.

Sherwood, a skilful spy, was able to win his trust; surmising that congresses of the members of the Secret Society took place, albeit infrequently, not more than once a year, in Kamenka, he told Vadkovsky that he was a member of the Society, and Vadkovsky, because of his trusting nature, believed him, and became his intimate associate; from him Sherwood learned the details of the Secret Society; Vadkovsky even informed him that the statutes of the Society and a list of its members were kept in a concealed pocket in his violin case; and Sherwood returned to Witt with all this information obtained by deceit... I have described Sherwood and Vadkovsky in such detail here because, as a result of Sherwood's information, Vadkovsky was arrested even before the death of Emperor Alexander and taken to the Schliesselburg Fortress on the instructions of Arakcheyev, and thus, even before the information given by Maiboroda, there existed considerable detailed information on the Secret Society and its activity.[5]

When I recall Vadkovsky—far be it from me to criticise his incautious actions. I have profound respect for his memory as a remarkable man as regards his intellect, the warmth of his heart and feelings, and the firmness of his convictions, and his incautious trustfulness is excusable partly as a result of those very feelings, his lack of experience and his youth...

What can I say about Maiboroda? His is a character so base that there is simply nothing to say about him except against him. He began his service in the Moscow Guards Regiment; but how and whence he entered it I do not know, though there was a rumour that his trans-

fer to the army was the result of the indignation of his brother-officers in that regiment over his disreputable behaviour. Transferred to the Vyatsky Regiment, he was as an officer acquainted with all the minutiae of service at the front, appointed commander of the 1st Grenadier Company by Pestel. Pestel had to take steps to bring the regiment up to the level of front-line training then required, as this regiment had fallen dreadfully behind in this area. Maiboroda, a crafty man, was well aware that, in achieving this aim in the unit under him, he must, in order to satisfy the views and judgements of Pestel, avoid the use of harsh measures towards his subordinates. By this conduct he captivated Pestel, and gradually won his trust, playing the role of a man who understood the ideas, feelings and aim of the noble political views of Pestel, and he charmed him so successfully that Pavel Pestel considered him worthy of being accepted into membership of the Secret Society. During one of my visits to Lintsy, Pestel introduced me to Maiboroda and said: "He is one of ours and fully deserves our trust." The review by the sovereign in 1823 of the Southern Army, in which the Vyatsky Regiment earned the approval of the emperor, and their increased co-operation in commanding the regiment, brought Pestel and Maiboroda even closer together. Gradually entering into his confidence, Maiboroda made himself Pestel's intimate and expressed to him the hope that, if Pestel would entrust him with taking delivery of kits and munitions[6] and undertake to ensure their provision and the procurement of supplies for the regiments in Moscow, then he would guarantee that everything would be done in the best possible manner. Pestel explained that delivery of goods was taken directly in Moscow, where one could call with contractors and place orders as one wished. This was entrusted to Maiboroda, but later, on his return, it appeared that he had not fulfilled as expected what he had promised, could not account as required for the money he had received, and therefore was legally liable. Finding himself thus in a desperate situation in this matter, he basely decided to secure his own salvation by destroying others, and revealed the existence of the Secret Society, its members, and the aims of the Society, about which, thanks to Pestel's initial trust in him, he had full information.

As he owned, together with his brother, a small estate near to Elizavetgrad,[7] he managed to obtain leave from

Pestel on the pretext of obtaining money in order to pay, departed thence, and there entered into contact with the above-mentioned Boshnyak, and through him with Count Witt, and told them all that he knew.[8] However, as Maiboroda was not satisfied with this treacherous act, he made a report directly addressed to the monarch in Taganrog. As I heard later, the monarch told no one about this report,[9] but it was found on his desk after his death, and then provided Dibich with the excuse to inform St Petersburg, and also to send Chernyshev immediately to Tulchin to make urgent enquiries.[10] Chernyshev, on passing through Gaisin [a staging post not far from where the Vyatsky Regiment was stationed, —*Comp.*], sent for Maiboroda and took the latter with him to Tulchin, where Maiboroda visually identified many who had been summoned for the initial investigation...[11]

I will digress from the main course of events in order to relate here an episode which directly involves myself and which shows that the emergence and activity of the Secret Society were known to Emperor Alexander [even earlier.—*Comp.*]. In October 1823, the sovereign reviewed the 2nd Army, and I, then brigade commander in that army, was an active participant in the review. According to the regulations, when my brigade marched past the tsar, I, from start to finish, was to stand not far from the sovereign, and after my last unit had passed by I was already turning my horse again when I suddenly heard the monarch summoning me to approach closer. Having done this, I heard him address the following words to me: "I am highly satisfied with your brigade; the Azovsky Regiment is one of the best in my army; the Dneprovsky has fallen behind slightly, but it also reveals traces of your labours. And, in my opinion, it would be far more profitable for you to continue them, and not to busy yourself with the government of my empire, in which, you will forgive me, you understand nothing."

This conversation or, more aptly, action clearly revealed that the tsar already knew a good deal about the Secret Society. How it was that no one heard what was said to me I do not understand; I was congratulated on all sides on account of my talk with the tsar, even Kiselyov,[12] when I went to him after the review, said to me: "Well, brother Sergei, it seems fortune is smiling on you! His Majesty spoke with you for quite some

time." And when I said to him: "Yes, but you should hear what he said!" and quoted the sovereign's words, Kisselyov asked me what I planned to do. "Request permission to retire!" I said. "No, my friend, write a letter to the sovereign, full of confidence in him; he will accept your explanation and, having listened to you, will be convinced that you have been slandered; give me this letter, I will hand it to the sovereign when I give my report."

This I did, and when Kisselyov handed it to him, the sovereign, having read it twice, said: "Monsieur Serge did not understand me; I said to him that it was time for him to settle down, to abandon the evil road he had chosen earlier, and I see that this he has done. I think I will ride through the place where his brigade is stationed, let him be there with a guard of honour, and I will reassure him and correct the erroneous impression that my words produced upon him."

I, together with the guard of honour, met the tsar. He was mightily pleased with the guard and, having called me to him, said: "You misunderstood me! I wished to tell you that your head was engaged with that which does not concern it, but now I am convinced that you have corrected this matter; continue, and it will give me great pleasure to appreciate this in you." Such is the true account of that episode in my life, which I have related in such detail in order to show that the sovereign knew a great deal about the Secret Society.[13]

"EACH FELT THAT IT WAS HIS DUTY ... TO CARRY OUT HIS APPOINTED TASK, AND WITH THESE FEELINGS, THESE BELIEFS IN THE INELUCTABLE NEED TO ACT, HE TOOK HIS PLACE IN THE RANKS."

Yevgenii Obolensky. From "Reminiscences about Kondratii Ryleyev"[1]

Prince Yevgenii Obolensky (1796-1865), a prominent member of the Decembrist movement, came from a wealthy and aristocratic family. In 1818 he was accepted into the Union of Welfare. Following the dissolution of the Union in 1821, he took part in the creation of the Northern Society of Decembrists in St Petersburg, and was a member of its leadership—the Supreme Duma.

Obolensky took an active part in the insurrection (The main culprit in the disturbances of 14 December is the verdict of the Committee of Enquiry). A few days before 14 December he was elected head of insurrection Headquarters. Resolute in action, Obolensky wounded with his bayonet Governor-General Miloradovich, who was attempting to "reason with" the rebellious soldiers. The Supreme Criminal Court placed Obolensky among the "first category" and condemned him to "death by decapitation". However, the tsar's confirmation commuted this sentence to penal servitude for life. On his return from penal servitude in 1856, Obolensky was actively involved in the preparation and implementation of the reforms of 1861, which abolished serfdom in Russia.

My acquaintance with Kondratii Ryleyev began with a sincere and heartfelt friendship towards him. I do not recall precisely, but it seems to me that this was at the beginning of 1822, i.e. shortly after the Guards Corps had returned from Beshenkovichi, i.e. following the proposed campaign abroad against the revolutionary movement in Italy.[2] At that time Ryleyev had only just published his *Voinarovsky*,[3] and was preparing his *Reflections* for print. His name was well-known in the literary world, and the freedom-loving nature of his ideas attracted the attention of members of the Secret Society. It was, as I remember, Ivan Pushchin who first made his acquaintance and, appreciating his personal qualities, accepted him immediately into the second level of the Society, among the "convinced", without asking the permission of the Supreme Duma.[4] This deviation from the regulations was approved by everyone, and fully vindicated by Ryleyev himself.

On coming to know Ryleyev more intimately during the first days of our acquaintance, I trusted him with all my heart and found in him that reciprocal trust which is so precious at any age, but is particularly appreciated in one's youth, when the powers of the soul seek space, a broad sphere of activity. This desire was in part satisfied by membership of the Secret Society. The Union of Welfare—such was its name—satisfied with all its noble aspirations those who sought in life not pleasures alone, but true moral benefit, both their own and that of all their fellows. It was difficult to resist the appeal of the Union, whose aim was: the moral improvement of all its members, reciprocal aid in attaining this aim, the formation of the intellect as a means of achieving a rational understanding of all that which composes society in its

civil organisation and moral tendencies, finally, the direction of contemporary society, through the personal activity of each member in his own circle fowards resolving major questions, both of a general political and of a contemporary nature, by the influence which each member could have both by virtue of his own education and also of that moral character which he was assumed to possess. In the misty distance, out of reach, we could see the ultimate goal—the political transformation of our native land—when all the seed we had sown would ripen, and general education would be accessible to the mass of the people. It was not difficult for Kondratii, with his ardent and poetic soul and sensitive nature, to assimilate all these rules. From the first step he plunged into the vocation that had opened up before him and devoted himself entirely to that lofty purpose which he had adopted as his own.

I will say a few words about his appearance and his early service. He was of average height; the features of his face composed a fairly regular oval in which no one feature dominated. His hair was black, slightly wavy, his eyes dark, with a pensive expression, and often sparkling during a lively discussion; his head, leaning slightly forward as he advanced at a steady, even pace, indicated that his mind was always occupied with that internal life which, expressing itself in inspired song when came the moment of inspiration, was at other times seeking the realisation of that idea which was the motivating principle underlying all his activity.

He received his education, it seems, in the 1st Cadet Corps, and began his service in the artillery. In conversations with him I learned that his youth had been stormy, but heard no details about this period in his life, and I was never acquainted with any of his service colleagues during that period in his life in the army. He married young, for love, and, as I recall, not with the full approval of his elderly mother, Nastasya Ryleyeva, who lived in a small village 60 versts from St Petersburg... His wife, Natalya, was passionately in love with him, and their little daughter Nastenka, then just four or five years old, small, dark and spirited, enlivened their domestic life with her presence.

In the early days of my acquaintance with Kondratii he had already long since left the army and was serving with Ivan Pushchin in the St Petersburg Criminal Law Office. Ivan Pushchin had also left military service and

exchanged his uniform of the Horse Guards Artillery for a modest post in the Criminal Law Office, hoping his work here would be of genuine usefulness, and that his example would prompt others to assume the obligations which the nobility sought to evade, preferring shining epaulettes to the benefit which they might bring by introducing into the lower courts that noble manner of thinking, those pure motivations which honour a man both in his private life and in public office, which constitute a reliable support for all the weak and defenceless, who always and everywhere constitute the majority, and whose sufferings and needs are scarcely audible to the minority of wealthy and powerful. Subsequently Kondratii left the Criminal Law Office and, having accepted the position of superintendent of the American Company,[5] leased a modest apartment in the company building. As a poet he was the acquaintance and friend of many men of letters. The literary world used to gather once a week at the residence of Nikolai Grech.[6] Kondratii was one of those who conversed with him frequently. In particular he was on friendly terms with Alexander Bestuzhev, who was then an adjutant to Duke Alexander of Wurtemberg.[7] Bestuzhev had then already commenced upon his literary career with short stories whose vivid language and picturesque plots wholly justified that vocation. Kondratii accepted him into the Society. His brother, Nikolai Bestuzhev, a lieutenant-captain who was no less talented and gifted, also joined the Society around the same time. He was the director of the Artillery Museum. Their younger brother, Pyotr, then serving in the artillery, was also accepted. Subsequently the fourth brother, Mikhail, also joined the Society. He had been transferred from the fleet to the Moscow Life-Guards Regiment. All of them were on friendly and family terms with Kondratii [Ryleyev.—*Comp.*] Here I should also make mention of Alexander Kornilovich,[8] an officer with the Guards Headquarters, who researched enthusiastically into the times of Peter the Great and presented the fruits of his labours in a simple account which aroused general sympathy for the subject on which he had written. Quite frequently Ryleyev himself was host to literary gatherings and to many of his close acquaintances and friends. Among those who visited him, in addition to those mentioned above, were: Wilhelm Küchelbecker,[9] Ivan Pushchin's friend from their Lyceum days, Faddei Bulgarin,[10] Fyodor

Glinka, Orest Somov, Nikita Muravyov, Prince Sergei Trubetskoy, Prince Alexander Odoyevsky and many others whose names I cannot recall. The conversation was also enlivened by purely literary subjects, but not infrequently it moved on to topical social issues of the day, in accordance with the common cast of mind of the majority of the friendly gathering. The mistress of the house was attentive to everyone, and her modest manner won universal respect. Kondratii Ryleyev's public activity in his position as the superintendent of the American Company would be worthy of separate consideration by virtue of that benefit which his activities there brought to the company, and, no doubt, of other, more concrete services also, as, only two years after he had taken up his post, the management of the Company presented him, as a mark of its gratitude, with a racoon coat, then valued at 700 roubles.

At this time, i.e. at the end of 1823 or the beginning of 1824, Pavel Pestel arrived in St Petersburg to establish contact, on instructions from the members of the Southern Society, with the members of the Northern Society in order to reach agreement on joint action by all the members of the Union: his arrival had a decisive influence on Kondratii. Therefore it is necessary at this point to look at the remarkable personality of Pavel Pestel. Not having had the opportunity to become closely acquainted with him, I can only describe the impression he produced upon me. Pavel was then a colonel and the commander of the Vyatsky Infantry Regiment. Not very tall, with agreeable features, Pavel was distinguished by a remarkable mind, a clear perception of the most abstract subjects, and a rare gift of oratory which captivated anyone to whom he decided to confide his inner thoughts. In the Southern Society he enjoyed universal trust and was elected, as soon as the Society was created, a member of the Supreme Duma. His view of the activities of the Society and its true aim corresponded to his manner of thinking, which demanded clarity in everything, a defined purpose and actions directed at achieving that purpose. The *Russkaya Pravda* of which he was the author constituted the programme which he proposed for the political state order. The aim of his trip to St Petersburg was to secure the agreement of the Northern Society to action co-ordinated with that of the Southern Society. The members of the Supreme Duma in St Pe-

tersburg at that time were: Prince Trubetskoy, Nikita Muravyov and myself. In the course of his first meeting with us, Pavel Pestel, with his characteristic and captivating way with words, explained to us that the vagueness of the aim and the means to its achievement gave the Society a character so indeterminate that the activities of each member individually were lost in vain effort, whereas, if they were directed towards a definite, clear and recognised purpose, they might promote its more rapid attainment. This idea was not new to us: it had long since been discussed at our meetings, and was a subject we all pondered on, but had not yet been given a definite form. Pestel's proposal constituted that form, and was attractive as the fruit of long personal reflections by a lucid mind and, in particular, enhanced by his convincing eloquence. It was difficult to resist such a captivating personality as Pavel Pestel. However, with all the qualities of his mind and persuasive speech, each of us felt that, once he accepted Pavel Pestel's proposal, he would have to abandon his own convictions and, obedient to him, follow the part he indicated. Moreover, we could not give a definitive answer without having first put this proposal before those members of the Society who had the greatest degree of general trust. Many of them were absent, and therefore we delayed a final answer until such a time as it should be possible to communicate the proposal to those whose mandate had placed us in the positions we occupied. In the meantime Pestel, whom we had introduced to Kondratii Ryleyev, came to be on intimate terms with him and, having revealed to him his innermost thoughts, converted him to his own view of the aim of the Society and the means for its realisation. It would seem that this friendship had a decisive influence on the subsequent political activity of Ryleyev. Shortly after the departure of Pestel, Prince Sergei Trubetskoy was appointed acting staff officer with the 4th Infantry Corps, whose Main Headquarters were in Kiev. Kondratii Ryleyev was elected a member of the Duma in his place...

In the second half of 1824, Ryleyev had the idea of publishing an almanac for 1825 in order to transform a literary undertaking into a commercial one. The aim of Ryleyev and his companion in this undertaking, Alexander Bestuzhev, was to provide a more substantial reward for literary work than the one hitherto received by those who devoted themselves to intellectual occu-

pations. Often their only recompense was to see their name printed in a particular journal; they themselves, while acquiring glory and fame, suffered cold and hunger and subsisted either on their salary or on their private income from their estate or capital. The undertaking was a success. All the men of letters of the day agreed to accept a fee for their articles written for the almanac, including Alexander Pushkin. The publication in 1825 of *Polyarnaya Zvezda*[11] was exceptionally successful, and recompensed the publishers not only for their initial expenses, but with a clear profit of around 1,500-2,000 roubles.

Thus began 1825, which we greeted with a smile of hope. I met the New Year at home, with my family. Having been granted 28 days' leave, I availed myself of it in order to renew my interrupted relations with many of the members of the Society whom the duties of service had taken to Moscow. Having fulfilled this purpose, and comforted by the loving affection of an ageing parent and dearly-beloved sisters, I returned to St Petersburg at the end of January. I found Ryleyev still occupied with the publication of the almanac, while the affairs of the Society appeared becalmed. Many of the original members were some distance from St Petersburg. Nikolai Turgenev was abroad, Yakov Tolstoy also. Ivan Pushchin had moved to Moscow, Prince Sergei Trubetskoy was in Kiev, Mikhail Naryshkin was also in Moscow. Thus the actual membership of the Society in St Petersburg was considerably reduced. Once again members had been accepted who were too young and inexperienced to contribute to the purpose and plans of the Society, and, therefore, they could only prepare themselves for future activity by means of constant reciprocal association and mutual exchange of ideas and feelings on certain days periodically appointed for individual meetings. Thus 1825 was imperceptibly passing by. I remember from that time the appearance of Kakhovsky, a former officer with the Royal Grenadier Regiment who had retired because of dissatisfaction with the commander of the regiment, and who had come to St Petersburg in connection with some family matters. Kondratii Ryleyev was acquainted with him, became more intimate with him, and discovering in him an ardent spirit, accepted him into the Society. I myself was but little acquainted with him, but from Ryleyev I know that he highly valued Kakhovsky's personal qualities. He

saw in him a second Sand.[12] I also know that Ryleyev rendered him considerable material assistance and did not grudge his purse for him.

About that time, i.e. about the beginning of 1825, either as a result of a dark, vague premonition or as a result of thoughts constantly fixed on one and the same object, doubt arose within me which was sufficiently important to trouble my inner peace. I communicated it to Kondratii. It consisted in the following: I asked myself—do we have the right, as private individuals composing a barely noticeable cipher amongst the vast majority of the population of our native land, to undertake a state coup and impose, almost by force, our view of state order upon those who, perhaps, are content with the present one, and do not seek something better; if they seek and aspire to a better one, then do they seek and aspire to it by means of historical development? This idea long robbed me of peace in the minutes and hours of my leisure, when the mind passes through the process of self-examination. Perhaps, it arose in me as a result of the promise we had made to Pavel Pestel, and the decision we had made to use either the moment of the succession or some other important political event to carry through the final aim of the Union, i.e. to carry through a state coup using those means which would be available at that time.

Having communicated my thoughts to Ryleyev, I found in him an impassioned opponent of my views. His objections were justified. He said that ideas are subject to the laws of the majority or the minority, that they are freely generated and freely develop in every intelligent being, furthermore, that they are communicative, and if they are inclined to the general benefit, if they are not born of feelings of egotism and self-interest, then they are only the expression by some individuals of that which the majority feels but is as yet unable to express. That was why he had assumed the right to speak and act in the spirit of the purpose of the Union as the expression of a common idea still not expressed by the majority, in the full certainty that, as soon as these ideas were communicated to the majority, the majority would accept them and confirm them with its total support. As evidence of the sympathy of the majority he quoted innumerable examples of general and individual dissatisfaction with restriction, injustices, both those perpetrated by private individuals, and those orig-

inating from the supreme power; finally he quoted examples of freedom-loving ideas which had developed almost spontaneously among certain of the merchant and lower middle classes with whom he was personally acquainted. Feeling and appreciating the justice of his objections, I realised, however, that if the ideas of truth, freedom and justice necessarily belong to every thinking being, and are therefore accessible and comprehensible to all, then the form of their expression, or their expression in action must be governed by some general laws which should express one universal idea. The poor man, by his sense of justice, may say to the rich man: give me a portion of your wealth. But if he, on receiving a refusal, decides, acting on that same feeling of truth, to take that portion by force, then by his action he violates the very idea of justice which had arisen in him with the feeling of his poverty. I also realised that the state order is the expression or realisation of the ideas of freedom, truth and right, but the form of the state order depends not on theoretical views, but on the historical development of the people, buried deep in the collective consciousness, in common popular sentiment. I also vaguely realised that, in addition to criminal, civil and state laws as the expression of the ideas of freedom, truth and right, the state order should also include the expression of the idea of supreme love, binding all into one common family. Its expression is the Church. Ryleyev and I argued long and heatedly, or perhaps it would be better to say that we exchanged ideas, feelings and views. Every day for a month or more he would call to see me or I would go to him, and we spent hours in conversation with each other, parting when we were already weary from our long and late discussion. In these daily conversations the subjects were philosophical and religious. However, after many digressions, Ryleyev came to the subject which I had raised at the start. I saw that he understood it as a cooling on my part towards the cause of the Society, and therefore his efforts were directed at not permitting me to cool.

Meanwhile, in the secret recesses of our fate a tragic event was being prepared which none of us anticipated and which struck us like a bolt from the blue. Emperor Alexander was making ready for a journey to the south. There were many rumours circulating at the time about the reasons for his journey. Amongst other things it was said that he had prepared for himself a place of rest from

the labours of government in Taganrog, where a palace had been made ready for him, and where he planned, following his abdication from the throne, to settle with his virtuous wife in profound solitude in order to devote the remainder of his days to peace and quiet. Many signs of exhaustion from the duties of office and the deep disturbance of the best qualities of the mind had long been visible not only to those who were close to his person, but also to us, who occupied lower rungs in the government hierarchy. The disbanding of the old Semyonovsky Regiment, his favourite, had first shaken his faith in the devotion to his person of those Guards regiments in whose loyalty he had been the most assured. It cannot be doubted that he was convinced that the cause of the manifest insubordination of the regiment was not explained solely by the petty abuses of Colonel Shwarz, by his inability to deal with soldiers, his desire to degrade the spirit of soldiers and officers, but by the activity of the Secret Society, of membership of which he suspected many officers of the old Semyonovsky Regiment. In this he was mistaken...

But let us return to his journey to Taganrog and to the first news about his ill-health following his trip to the Crimea. Who could have thought that the minor attacks of Crimean fever heralded a dangerous illness that would progress rapidly to its end? The telegraph did not then exist, and therefore we calmly awaited further news which, however, came quickly and was menacing in content. Then began the prayers in the churches for the health of the sovereign and, as I recall, it was during the second such service in the Winter Palace that the news came of his death, and the service became a solemn requiem. Then Constantine was proclaimed emperor, and the following day the whole of the Guards and all the higher authorities took their oath of allegiance to him.

On the eve of the ceremony of the oath of allegiance, all the members of the Society who were in the city gathered at the home of Kondratii Ryleyev. All decided unanimously that in such a short period of time it was impossible to oppose the accession to the throne or undertake anything decisive. Furthermore, it was proposed that, with the appearance of the new emperor, the activity of the Society would be temporarily discontinued. It was with a feeling of sadness that we dispersed to our homes, believing that the realisation of our noblest dreams would not now happen for a very long time, if

ever! The next day came the news of the possible abdication of the new emperor. It was also then that the last will and testament of the late sovereign, and the possible accession to the throne of Great Prince Nicholas, were made known. Ivan Pushchin hurried from Moscow to see us and share with us both sorrow and joy. All was activity, and once again hope blazed up in our hearts. I will not describe our daily meetings, the work done by Ryleyev who, despite his illness (he was discovered at that time to have quinsy) employed all his strength of spirit to carry out our planned intentions—to avail ourselves of an interregnum to bring about a state coup...

The day of 14 December dawned. Early that morning I was at the home of Ryleyev, who had long been up and about. Having agreed on our further actions, I returned home to my duties. On arriving on the square at the same time as the Moscow Regiment, I found Kondratii there. He was wearing a soldier's bag and crossbelt and was preparing to take his place in the ranks of soldiers. However, shortly afterwards he was obliged to leave to ensure the speedy arrival of the Royal Grenadier Regiment. He left as ordered, carried out his instructions, but from then on I did not see him again. Many were the emotions of that remarkable day, much has imprinted itself indelibly on the heart's memory. The verdict on that day and on the actions of the Society on that day has long since been pronounced. Which of us can deny that we abused the trust the troops placed in us, that we drew after us ordinary people who honoured the lawful oath of allegiance they had taken so recently? I and many with me objected to this measure, but near, unavoidable necessity forced us to violate moral conviction in favour of an action for which the Society had been preparing over many long years. I will not speak of the possibility of success, it is hardly possible that any of us was certain of it! Each hoped for a favourable circumstance, for unexpected assistance, each felt that it was his duty to the Society to keep his word, to carry out his appointed task, and with these feelings, these beliefs in the ineluctable need to act, he took his place in the ranks...

"THE FIRST BREATH OF FREEDOM"

"The attempted uprising on 14 December is not a mutiny, but the first experiment in political revolution in Russia, an experiment considered honourable in the social history and in the eyes of other enlightened peoples."

Gavriil Batenkov

"To sacrifice all, to give one's very life for love of one's Fatherland was our sincere motivation... Egoism was alien to our feeling..."

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol

... *Events were developing rapidly*. On 19 November 1825, far away from St Petersburg, in Taganrog, Emperor Alexander I suddenly died. He had no children, and by law the throne should have passed to his eldest brother, Constantine, who was then in Warsaw as ruler in the name of the tsar. However, in 1823, on the insistence of Alexander I, Constantine had been obliged to renounce his claim to the throne in favour of another brother, Nicholas. This decision was then, however, for reasons that remain unknown, kept a closely guarded secret.

The news of the death of Alexander I arrived in St Petersburg on 27 November. The unpublished abdication of Constantine did not have the force of law. On that same day, the Court, the Senate, the State Council, the troops, the population of St Petersburg and Nicholas himself took the oath of allegiance to Constantine as emperor. Yet Constantine did not accept the throne, although he did not wish formally to renounce it. The result was an extremely tense interregnum. The Decembrists decided to make use of it: "The occasion is suitable—the kind that must not be missed." Daily meetings were held at Ryleyev's apartment. It was decided that on the day when the new oath of allegiance was to be taken to Emperor Nicholas I, they would bring out the revolutionary troops onto Senate Square, not allow the senators to take the oath, compel them by force of arms to declare the government overthrown and read out to the people a revolutionary Manifesto, previously drawn up by the Decembrists. The Manifesto proclaimed the abolition of the autocratic power of the tsar, the emancipation of the peasant serfs, the abolition of military settlements, the abolition of all social estates and class privileges, the equality of all citizens before the law, the introduction of elections to all organs of power, the reorganisation of the army. It was proposed to establish a "Provisional Re-

volutionary Government", and then convene a "Grand Council" (a constituent assembly) which was to determine the form of state power in Russia and adopt a constitution. Sergei Trubetskoy, a colonel at the General Staff, was elected the dictator of the uprising as the most senior in military rank among the members of the Secret Society. Sergei Trubetskoy, a hero of the war of 1812, had revealed his courage in battle. Soon the Decembrists will realise that the courage on the battlefield and the courage of a revolutionary are not the same thing... Yevgenii Obolensky was named commander of insurrection Headquarters.

On the morning of 12 December Nicholas received from Dibich, who was in Taganrog, a report on a conspiracy that had been discovered, and on the arrest of several members of the Southern Society. That same day Second Lieutenant Yakov Rostovtsev saw Nicholas and informed him about a planned insurrection in St Petersburg. Nicholas decided not to wait for the official abdication of Constantine but to proclaim himself emperor. A manifesto was hastily prepared proclaiming the accession of Nicholas. The day on which the oath of allegiance would be taken to the new emperor was fixed—14 December 1825. The date of this new oath was kept strictly secret, but the Decembrists learned of it (as they did of the reports made about them). On the evening of 13 December, at Ryleyev's apartment, after long and heated discussions, the final plan for the insurrection was drawn up: on the morning of 14 December they were to assemble the troops on Senate Square; Alexander Bulatov was to take his soldiers, seize the SS Peter and Paul Fortress and turn it into the bastion of the uprising; the unit under the command of Alexander Yakubovich was to occupy the residence of the tsar—the Winter Palace—and arrest his family; Pyotr Kakhovsky, wearing the uniform of a Royal Grenadiers, was to penetrate into the Winter Palace and kill Nicholas.

Dawn was approaching. None of the officer-members of the Secret Society slept that night. Before daybreak they returned to their barracks. Alexander Bestuzhev delivered a brilliant speech to the Moscow Regiment. He said that the soldiers should not take the oath to Nicholas, who had concealed the will of the late tsar to reduce military service from 25 to 15 years, and also other benefits and relaxations for the people. "I spoke powerfully, I was listened to eagerly," recalled Bestuzhev later. The regiment came out in revolt. Led by Alexander

Bestuzhev and their company commanders (Captain Mikhail Bestuzhev and Staff-Captain Dmitrii Shchepin-Rostovsky), the soldiers of the Moscow Regiment marched to Senate Square with banners unfurled. A dense crowd immediately surrounded them. "The Moscow Regiment has mutinied and is moving towards the Senate!" the emperor was informed.

That was a great moment... The insurgent troops moved on towards the square. For the moment they were, it is true, but one regiment, but what a regiment! They had shown their selfless courage, their unbounded love for the Fatherland in the famous battle of Borodino: in the confrontation with Napoleon they had unflinchingly defended the approaches to Moscow. At 11 o'clock in the morning the regiment drew up in square formation by the monument to Peter I.

However, the plan for the uprising began to break down from the very beginning. Having received Rostovtsev's report, the tsar seized the initiative: the unusually early hour of 7 o'clock was the time set for the oath of allegiance to be taken in the Senate. By the time the Moscow Regiment was marching to the square, the senators, having taken the oath to Nicholas, had already departed. The main aim of the uprising—to compel the Senate to sanction a state coup—could not be attained. The SS Peter and Paul Fortress and the Winter Palace were not taken. Kakhovsky refused to assassinate Nicholas. Moreover, far from all the Guards regiments on which the Decembrists had been relying were willing to leave their barracks: early that morning Nicholas had already arranged for them to take the oath. Finally, Trubetskoy failed to appear on the square. The insurgents found themselves without leadership.

For more than an hour the Moscow Regiment stood alone on Senate Square. They waited for reinforcements, for the dictator. Trubetskoy did not appear. A cold wind blew from the Neva, whipping the falling snow. The soldiers in their light dress uniforms stood their ground, warming themselves only with loud shouts of "Hurrah!"

Nicholas called out troops still loyal to him, but time was needed for them to arrive. The Governor-General of St Petersburg, Miloradovich, was sent to talk with the insurgents. Miloradovich's courage and his popularity among the troops were well known to the tsar. In his dress uniform covered in medals and with a light blue ribbon across his shoulder, Miloradovich rode up to the

square of mutinous soldiers and began to persuade them to give their allegiance to Nicholas, reminding them of former battles they had waged under his command. It was a dangerous moment... Yevgenii Obolensky, realising that the soldiers might waver, demanded that Miloradovich "ride off". But the General paid him no attention. The Decembrists decided on a desperate measure. Obolensky used his bayonet to turn Miloradovich's horse, and in doing so slightly wounded Miloradovich in the thigh. Then a shot was fired, Miloradovich slithered into the arms of his adjutant. It was Pyotr Kakhovsky who had fired the fatal shot.

An attempt was made to play on the religious feelings of the soldiers. Wearing their robes, and with crosses raised in their hands, the metropolitan bishops Serafim and Yevgenii moved towards the column of soldiers. The leaders of the insurrection demanded that they also "move off" and "not meddle in other people's business". Taken aback by this, the holy parliamentarians departed in confusion.

Meanwhile Nicholas was bringing onto the square troops loyal to him. The Semyonovsky Regiment arrived at the Manege; the men of the Pavlovsky Regiment blocked the entrance to Galernaya Street, which led to the square; the men of the Preobrazhensky Regiment blocked the Angliiskaya Embankment near the Isaakiyevsky Bridge. The Life-Guards of the Finlandsky Regiment blocked the Isaakiyevsky Bridge. The Moscow Regiment was surrounded on all sides. The Horse Guards arrived, commanded by Alexei Orlov, a favourite of the tsar. Nicholas ordered the Horse Guards to attack the mutinous soldiers, but the attack was easily beaten off with running fire.

Around one o'clock in the afternoon a company of Royal Grenadiers led by Lieutenant Sutgof made their way along the Neva embankment and broke through to support the Moscow Regiment. Almost at the same time, having thrust aside the covering force of the Pavlovsky Regiment, sailors from the Guards Naval Crew under the command of Nikolai Bestuzhev broke through to the square. The men of the Moscow Regiment greeted their comrades with cries of "Hurrah!" Their solitary vigil was at an end. Then the insurgents received yet further reinforcement: 900 Royal Grenadiers brought out by Lieutenant Nikolai Panov crossed the ice on the Neva, reached the Winter Palace and broke into the courtyard... However, on seeing sappers guarding the palace, Panov called

out: "Lads, these are not ours!" and led the detachment back out onto Senate Square, having made him way past a line of government troops in sight of Nicholas himself. Subsequently Nicholas I said that "not desiring bloodshed", he had himself ordered the troops to disperse and allow Panov's men to pass.

Three thousand insurgent soldiers and sailors with 30 officers and 6 civilian members of the Secret Society had gathered on Senate Square. They were surrounded by four times as many government troops. However, despite this superiority in numbers, Nicholas was unable to disperse the insurgents. The Horse Guards made two further attacks upon the rebels, but they did not attack "at full force". The insurgents also spared the Horse Guards, firing into the air. Invisible bonds united the soldiers on both sides, a unity that did not work in favour of Nicholas I. "During all the time we were standing on the square, soldiers came, sent by the infantry regiments, and asked us to hold out until evening, when they promised they would all join us," recalled the Decembrist Alexander Belyaev.

News about the start of an insurrection spread like lightning around the city. The people poured onto Senate Square, blocking the nearby roads and streets and the Neva embankments and "surging like a stormy sea"... Eye-witnesses affirm that about 30 to 40 thousand people gathered at the place of the insurrection, clearly sympathetic towards the insurgents and vigorously active: crowds of people disarmed and beat the police who tried to disperse them, stones and pieces of wood were thrown at the tsar and his retinue. Nicholas I himself recalled how workers from the St Isaac Cathedral under construction nearby "began to throw pieces of wood at us from behind the fence". The empress put down in her diary on that day: "The mob was on the side of the insurgents." The people asked the insurgents "to give them weapons", promising to "turn St Petersburg upside down"...

Dusk came. Nicholas I, fearing that "the rebellion might communicate itself to the mob", gave the order to bring in the artillery.

...The insurgents had finally decided to choose a new military leader—Obolensky. There was an hour left before their defeat... The insurgents were surrounded by a solid ring of government troops.

What could Obolensky do?

In order to rescue the rebellious regiments from this "tragic standing", it was necessary to launch an offensive: break through the ring of government troops, draw onto the side of the insurgents the many thousands of ordinary people and put weapons in their hands. The Decembrists could not bring themselves to take such a step.

...The government troops broke ranks to let through the artillery weapons. Cannon were placed just 60 feet away from the insurgents. Then came the command to fire from the first cannon. The artillery soldier refused to obey the command. "Our men, your honour," he said to the officer who had run up to him. The officer seized the fuse and lit the charge. The first cannon fired. The warning shot over the heads of the insurgents killed many of the spectators gathered on the Senate roof. The second and subsequent shots fired grape shot into the ranks of the insurgents. The column of soldiers and sailors wavered and ran. "Dead bodies of soldiers and civilians kept falling down at every step; the soldiers ran into the houses... tried to take shelter behind the plinths, but the grape shot ricochetted from the walls and spared not a single nook or cranny," recalled Mikhail Bestuzhev.

By 6 o'clock that evening the insurrection had been suppressed. "St Petersburg was like a city after a storm," recalled the Decembrist Belyaev. "Bonfires burned all night. Troops were deployed in every district; mounted patrols rode through the streets in whole detachments." During the grape-shot fire from the cannon, many hundreds of the insurgents had perished, and also many witnesses to the insurrection.

On 29 December began the insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment in the south, under the command of Sergei Muravyov-Apostol. He had about 970 troops at his disposal. For a whole week the insurgent regiment carried out raids across the snow-covered fields of the Ukraine, hoping for support from other military units in which served members of the Secret Society. Their hopes proved vain. The military command succeeded in isolating the insurgent regiment, moving unreliable troops away from its path. At the same time loyal troops were brought in to surround the area of the insurrection. The end came on 3 January 1826, when the Chernigovsky Regiment was met by a detachment of government troops and fired on with grape shot.

The tsar cruelly dealt with the insurgents...

"THE SECRET SOCIETY, WELL INFORMED ABOUT ALL THE ACTIONS ... OF THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP, AND ALSO KNOWING THE MINDS OF THE OFFICERS AND LOWER RANKS... ARRANGED ITS ACTIVITY ACCORDING TO THIS INFORMATION."

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Interregnum in November-December 1825. From the Reminiscences of Sergei Trubetskoy.[1]

At that time an unexpected piece of news amazed the capital: the sovereign was dying, and two days later came the news of his death. On this one event another had to follow, no less important. People had grown accustomed to the rule of Alexander; the thought of a successor frightened everyone, and all the more so as it was tinged with uncertainty as to who would be that successor. For all his failings, Alexander was considered better than his brothers. He had the halo of glory acquired in the struggle against Napoleon, that outstanding genius of his age. His magnanimity in victory, his mildness towards the vanquished, the absence of vainglory, remained in people's memory, although the trust of the nations in him wavered. Though in Europe he was reproached with not fulfilling those promises which had been made to the nations in 1812 and then repeated solemnly at the Vienna Congress,[2] though in his own country, he did not meet the expectations and hopes which his word had given rise to; though he was firmly bound to the idea of his autocracy and, content with his acquired fame, did not concern himself with the well-being of his subjects, in brief, grew lazy; though to this had to be added indications of despotism towards many individuals, and persecution of those ideas and reforms which he himself had sought to propagate, and though even he was accused of feeling contempt towards the people, yet, despite all of this, his death was seen as a genuine loss. Perhaps, under a despotic government, any change in the ruler arouses fear. People grow accustomed to the failings of the despot, provided they are not major vices, while a change in the autocratic ruler brings with it instinctive anxiety. Howsoever it may be, fear ruled in the hearts of all those who were not close to one or other of the two personages who might succeed to the throne. Constantine had left no good memory of himself in the capital. Nonethe-

less people hoped that the years had wrought their change, and this hope was stimulated by news from the Kingdom of Poland.[3] Nicholas was known only for his ill manners towards the officers and his harshness towards the soldiers of the Guards Division under his command. The court wanted Nicholas, and those who attended the court said that under him nothing would change, everything would remain as it had been, while it was not fitting that Constantine should become the Russian emperor as he was married to a Polish woman; how could it be permitted that an ordinary Polish lady of the court should be placed higher than princesses of the royal blood?

Grand Prince Nicholas, on the evening of the day he learned that the sovereign was seriously ill, summoned the Princes Lopukhin and Kurakin[4] and Count Miloradovich and suggested the possibility of a vacant throne, and his claim to it. Count Miloradovich resolutely refused to give his support in this, arguing the impossibility of persuading the troops and the people to take an oath of allegiance save to the lawful successor to the throne. Although some individuals knew of Constantine's promise, when he married, to renounce his claim to the throne, this promise was given privately, and Emperor Alexander had not named any heir to succeed him.[5] His last will, expressed in a sealed paper, could not be accepted as law since the Russian sovereign could not dispose of the succession to the throne as he willed.[6] If Constantine did not wish to accept the throne, then he must indicate this by issuing a manifesto in his own name, and then Nicholas would be the lawful successor. However, they must begin, immediately following the death of the sovereign, with an oath of allegiance to Constantine. The meeting continued till two o'clock in the morning. The Grand Prince argued his claims, but Count Miloradovich did not wish to recognise them, and refused his support. On this the meeting ended.

I arrived at the palace when the prayers for the recovery of the tsar had already abruptly terminated on the arrival of the courier with the news of the death of the sovereign. I went in through the ordinary small entry, known as the commandant stairway, and was exceedingly surprised, on entering the first room, which divides the chapel off from the internal guard, to find Count Miloradovich instructing Commandant Bashutsky to dispatch that very hour adjutants to all those on guard duty

with orders for them to take the oath of allegiance. This instruction was issued by the Count prior to the meeting of the State Council. I entered the Council Chamber and there, with a few others, adjutants to both the Princes—Nicholas and Mikhail—waited to hear what decision would be taken by the Council. A velvet cushion was brought in, on which stood a tiny shrine of gold, or gilded, and we learned that they were bringing the last will and testament of the late emperor. Opening the meeting, Prince Alexander Golitsyn[7] said that it was to be read immediately following the death of the emperor, before taking any oath of allegiance or undertaking any other measures. Count Miloradovich immediately replied to this speech and said that, as regards the succession to the throne, the sovereign, according to the existing laws of Russia, could not dispose of it in his will, that out of respect for the person of the deceased his last will could be read, but that it could not be carried out. Then the order was given to read out the will, and when it had been read, Admiral Mordvinov[8] stood up and said: "Let us now go and take our oath of allegiance to Constantine." Everyone stood up and went immediately into the chamber of Grand Prince Nicholas in order to inform him of the decision taken by the Council. We hurried into the rooms through which the Grand Prince would have to pass, and I saw him as, white and unsteady on his legs, he went into his mother's chamber. From there they went directly into the large chapel, and we in our turn also went there. In the room in which the internal guard usually stands, which was mounted that day by the 1st Platoon of His Majesty's Life-Guards Preobrazhensky Regiment, there stood a lectern with a cross and bible. The soldiers asked what this meant. "The oath of allegiance",came the reply; and they with one voice: "What oath? ". "To the new sovereign". "We already have a sovereign". "He has died." "We did not know he was ill." Commandant Bashutsky arrived and began to tell them what was known about the illness and death of the sovereign. Then the head man stepped out to the front and began to repeat the same objections, adding that they could not take the oath to a new sovereign when they already had a reigning sovereign, and that they could not believe he was dead as they had not even heard that he was ill. The general on duty from His Majesty's Headquarters came to the Commandant's assistance, confirmed his words and began to persuade the men to take

the required oath. The soldiers insisted stubbornly on their refusal. In the meantime Grand Prince Nicholas and the members of the State Council had already taken the oath in the chapel, and Nicholas came out to the obstinate guard, confirmed the words of the generals and declared that he himself had just taken the oath to the new sovereign, Constantine. The disturbance quietened and the soldiers took the oath...

On the very day when the oath of allegiance was taken to the new emperor, Constantine, i.e. 27 November, Grand Prince Nicholas summoned Full State Councillor Fyodor Opochinin. This man had once been an adjutant to Constantine, and had then transferred to civil service, which certain unpleasant circumstances had caused him to leave, and he lived a rather retired life in St Petersburg in a small circle of close acquaintances. He constantly preserved the benevolence of Constantine towards him, and even his friendship; he lived in the Marble Palace which belonged to the Cesarevich (Crown Prince), and spent the summer in the Strelninsky Palace, which also belonged to Constantine. It was this man that Nicholas had chosen as the intermediary between himself and his brother, and had entrusted him with the task of persuading Constantine to cede him the throne, reminding His Highness that he had himself, voluntarily, without any compulsion, renounced his right of succession. On the night of the 29th Opochinin had departed, but had met en route Grand Prince Mikhail, who was coming from Warsaw, and had returned with him to the capital. Opochinin told me that Constantine, having received the news from Taganrog about the death of Alexander, had locked himself away in his room for the whole day, received no one, given no instructions, and no announcement about the death of the sovereign had been made in Warsaw. Opochinin was once more dispatched, with the further request that Constantine send a formal and solemn abdication, on the basis of which Nicholas could succeed without obstacle to the throne. Count Miloradovich repeatedly insisted that this be done, if Constantine himeslf did not wish to come to St Petersburg and transfer the throne personally to his brother... In response to such insistence, Nicholas received from Constantine a note written in his own hand, in which he said, in the most discourteous and even improper terms that he didn't care what was going on in St Petersburg, and that they could do whatever they wanted and however they wanted...

The interregnum lasted for exactly two weeks. No other occasion could have been more favourable for carrying out the plans of the Secret Society, if it had been strong enough; but its members were dispersed over the vast area of the Russian Empire. Only a few members were in the capital, where the main action was to take place. This notwithstanding, those members who were there decided to use the forthcoming event, and all the more so since the thinking public began to expect that Constantine would not accept the succession to the throne. The reasons why they decided to use this forthcoming event were as follows: 1) there was no example in Russia of the lawful heir to the throne willingly renouncing it, and therefore one could assume that such a renunciation would appear incredible; 2) the young Grand Princes were not popular, particularly with the military. Only a section of the court preferred to have Nicholas as emperor. The ladies of the court found it demeaning to have as an empress a Polish woman of humble origin;[9] 3) in all the homes belonging to the aristocratic society of the capital people expressed dissatisfaction with the strange situation in which the state found itself; 4) finally, the members of the Secret Society were confident of the assistance of certain high-ranking state officials who, fearing to act openly while the Society had still not revealed its strength, had declared themselves to be ready to join as soon as it was seen that a sufficient military force could support them.

In the meantime it became known that Emperor Constantine was not himself coming, and that he did not wish to issue a manifesto concerning his abdication and the transfer of the throne to Nicholas—a rather difficult situation for the latter to find himself in. He would be obliged to issue a manifesto in his own name, but how could he convincingly demonstrate the truth of the abdication and on what right base his accession? Would it not have all the marks of usurpation? To issue a manifesto in the name of the Senate would be the most lawful and acceptable action, as the people were accustomed to receiving all decrees from the Senate. However, it was found that this would be to accord the Senate an authority that belonged to the emperor alone, and such a precedent could thereafter serve as a pretext for the Senate to dispose of this power at its own discretion.

In such circumstances it was decided to issue a manifesto in the name of the emperor who was acceding to

the throne, and to publish the letter from Constantine to the late sovereign; to begin the administration of the oath of allegiance with the troops, and to make this the personal responsibility of the Guards regimental commanders if they could not overcome the anticipated resistance of the regiments subordinate to them. Count Miloradovich, having convinced Nicholas of the need to offer the throne to its lawful heir, and then witnessing the strange behaviour of Constantine, now decided to support Nicholas in overcoming the obstacles involved in proclaiming him emperor.

The Secret Society, well informed about all the actions of the Grand Prince and all the military leadership, and also knowing the minds of the officers and lower ranks as revealed in their conversations, arranged its activity according to this information. It knew that it would be difficult, even totally impossible, to convince the lower ranks, and even many of the officers, that Constantine had voluntarily renounced the throne; even the ordinary people recognised Mikhail and not Nicholas as the lawful heir, as the one born when their father was emperor.[10] Only the habit of unconditional obedience and compulsion could force the soldiers to take the oath of allegiance on the demand of their superiors, and as the regimental commanders were, for the most part, not popular with their subordinates and did not enjoy their trust, it would be easy to shake that obedience. And indeed, when, on the morning of 14 December, the regiments were brought out to take the oath, they revealed disbelief and uncertainty, which, on the first words by the officers expressing doubt with regard to the lawfulness of the required oath, turned into manifest resistance... It is a known fact that the military commanders habitually consider the Russian soldier to be an oaf who turns and marches in the direction in which his superior points him. Nonetheless, Count Miloradovich, who, during the whole of the interregnum, had gathered information on the mood and disposition of the soldiers and officers, was convinced that it would not be easy to oblige them to take the oath by means of a manifesto issued by the very person who wished to accede to the throne. The Count took great pains but failed to ensure that this manifesto be issued by that emperor to whom they had taken the oath, and only in that case did he promise that order in the capital would not be disturbed. The doubts of the Count caused Nicholas' confidence to

waver, and all the more so as he, for his part, had been forewarned by his supporters about the mood of the Guards and the existence of a Secret Society which intended to avail itself of this mood.

"I FORESEE FAILURE, BUT AN UPHEAVAL IS NECESSARY: THE TACTIC OF THE REVOLUTION CONSISTS IN ONE WORD 'DARE!' " (K. Ryleyev).

Nikolai Bestuzhev on Preparations for the Insurrection on 14 December 1825. From His Reminiscences.[1]

...Let us now pass on to the most important period in the life of Ryleyev. Divided between literature, his activities for the Society and his family concerns, he quietly lived his life, enjoying general respect, beloved of his family and friends and suspected by the government which, it would seem, had recently weakened with regard to its police surveillance. Gradually the secret business of the Society's preparations distracted him from other occupations; he devoted himself wholly to just one concern.

I do not know if he himself was deceived, or whether he wished to present the affairs of the Society to others in the best light, but from his impassioned talk of the growing number of members who belonged to the union of people of good will, I and others concluded that our Society was numerous and that important people were involved in it. In this situation we learned of the unexpected death of Alexander. For more than a year, mainly in our talks, I had grown accustomed to hear from Ryleyev that the death of the emperor was intended by the Society as the moment when it would begin to act, and when I heard about the gathering in the Palace following the unexpected death of the tsar, about the confusion among the claimants to the throne, about the decision to take the oath of allegiance to Constantine, I hurried to Ryleyev. I was joined by Torson.[2] This occurrence was quite unanticipated; the news of it did not issue from the place I had expected it to issue from, and, instead of a commencement of our activity, I saw that Ryleyev knew nothing whatsoever about it. Anxious and disturbed in spirit, seeing the favourable moment missed, not seeing

the Society, not seeing any sign of action, I began bitterly to reproach Ryleyev with having acted differently towards us than he should have.

"Where is the Society," I said, "about which you spoke so much? Where are those whose moment to reveal themselves has come? Where are they to gather, what are they to undertake, where are their forces, what are their plans? Why did this Society, if it is so powerful, not know about the illness of the tsar, whereas in the Palace bulletins on his critical state have been received for more than a week? If there are any plans, tell them to us, and we will execute them—speak!"

For a long while Ryleyev said nothing, sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. He was amazed at this unexpected event, and finally said:

"This circumstance has shown us clearly that we are powerless. I deceived myself; we do not have an agreed plan, no measures have been taken, the number of members here in St Petersburg is small, but despite that we will meet again this evening; in the meantime I will go to gather information, and you, if you can, discover the mood in the city and among the troops."

Batenkov and brother Alexander[3] appeared at that moment, and the beginning of those events which marked the period of the interregnum was a poor meeting of five men.

From that moment the home of Ryleyev became the gathering place for our meetings, and he their moving spirit. That evening we exchanged the information we had gathered, it was not encouraging. The troops had taken the oath to Constantine without enthusiasm but, however, without any expression of dissatisfaction. In the city they still did not know whether Constantine would abdicate, the secret of his former renunciation of the throne in favour of Nicholas had still not spread. Couriers had ridden off to Warsaw, and everyone was sure that matters would remain as they were.

When there remained just three of us: Ryleyev, my brother Alexander and myself, then, after long discussion, we were about to write a proclamation to the troops and distribute it secretly in the barracks; but later, realising this would be inconvenient, we tore up the few pages we had already written and decided that all three of us would go that night around the city, stop each soldier, stop by each guard, and pass on by word of mouth that they had been deceived, not being shown the

last testament of the late tsar, in which the peasants had been emancipated and recruit service reduced to 15 years.

We decided to tell them this in order to prepare the troops for any event which might subsequently occur. I am referring to this intention now because it marked the beginning of our actions and remained unknown to the Committee [of Enquiry.—*Comp.*].

It is impossible to imagine the eagerness with which the soldiers listened to us, impossible to describe the speed with which our words spread among the troops; the following day another walk around the city assured us of this.

Two days of restless anxiety, two sleepless nights spent walking around the city, and disillusionment, powerfully affected Ryleyev. He developed an inflamed throat and took to his bed, the inflammation turned to quinsy, he was scarcely able to breathe, but he did not cease from taking part in the affairs of the Society. Slowly our numbers increased, members arrived from all over the country, and the illness of Ryleyev was the excuse for endless meetings in his house...

Meanwhile doubts regarding the succession increased. A fresh opportunity presented itself to use the moment of taking the new oath. We worked zealously, prepared the Guards, fostered and stimulated the dislike of Nicholas that existed among the troops. Ryleyev's health was improving, and he did not cease to be the source and the mainspring of all the actions of the Society.

However, notwithstanding our successes, despite the fact that new members joined, that promises had been made on behalf of many regiments, we had little confidence in our forces; no one could vouch for the entire regiment, the company commanders who were involved in the conspiracy could answer only for their own companies, and then only in certain favourable circumstances. Often in our talks there was a definite expression of doubt as regards success. Nevertheless, we saw the need to act, felt the necessity of arousing Russia. Ryleyev used to say:

"I foresee failure, but an upheaval is necessary: the tactic of the revolution consists in one word 'Dare!' and if it proves unfortunate, we will teach others by our failure."

Finally, on 12 December, a Saturday, Ryleyev came to see me. He looked anxious, he told me that Obolensky

had obtained from Rostovtsev[4] the information that he had had a talk with Nicholas in which he had informed him [the tsar.—*Comp.*] about the conspiracy, about the plans to use the mood of the soldiers, and had entreated him, in order to avoid bloodshed, either to renounce the throne or to await a formal and public abdication from the Cesarevich. Obolensky had compelled [Rostovtsev.—*Comp.*] to write the letter which he had composed prior to the meeting, and also to record his conversation with Nicholas.

"Here is the draft copy of both," continued Ryleyev, "written by Rostovtsev himself. Read it and tell me what you think about it."

I read it. It contained no reference to the existence of the Society, no names, but spoke of the plans to oppose the accession of Nicholas, of the possible bloodshed. Rostovtsev swore by his life that his statements were the truth, and asked to be incarcerated immediately in the fortress and not released if what he predicted did not occur.

"Are you certain," I said to Ryleyev, "that everything written in this letter, and the conversation, are in complete agreement with the truth, and that nothing has been omitted from the oral statements made by Rostovtsev?"

Obolensky guarantees the truth of this paper: he says that Rostovtsev told him this virtually of his own accord.

"Because of his kind heart, Obolensky is prepared to believe him; but I think that Rostovtsev wants to light a candle both to God and the devil. He reveals the conspiracy to Nicholas, then washes his hands before us by an admission in which, he says, there is nothing personal. Moreover, he could have written whatever he wishes in this admission, and concealed whatever it does not suit him to tell us. But let us assume that Rostovtsev, moved by regret, said and wrote neither more nor less; however, he writes about a plot, and although Nicholas is beset by so many problems at the moment that he has no time to interrogate an informer about it, or fear and politics prevent him from undertaking the necessary investigation, these reasons will, of course, no longer exist on the day after he has acceded to the throne, and Rostovtsev will be compelled to say something more about a subject about which he is now saying so little."

"But if something more had been said, then the secret police would already have taken us in hand."

"And I repeat that Nicholas fears to do that. The cornerstone of our conspiracy is loyalty to the oath of allegiance to Constantine and unwillingness to take the oath to Nicholas. This is the intention among the troops, and, of course, the secret police have informed Nicholas of it, but as he himself is not yet sure whether his brother will abdicate, then to arrest people who wished to remain loyal to their first oath could appear very suspect to Constantine, should he decide to accept the crown."[5]

"So, you think we are already known?"

"There can be no doubt of it, and we will be taken, if not now, then after the oath."

"So what do you suggest we should do?"

"Not show this letter to anyone, and act. Better to be taken on the square than in our beds. Better that they should realise what we are dying for than that they should be surprised when we mysteriously disappear from society, and no one knows where we are and why we disappeared."

Ryleyev threw his arms about me.

"I was sure," he said as he did this, "that such would be your opinion. So, may God go with us! Our fate is sealed! To our doubts will now, of course, be added all the obstacles. But we shall begin. I am certain that we will perish, but our example will remain. Let us sacrifice ourselves for the future freedom of our native land!"

We went together to see the colonel of the Finlandsky Regiment, Moller, a member of the Society, in order to ask for his decisive answer, but he was not at home. Ryleyev requested me to learn without fail of his intentions. I called again that evening at Moller's home and found him in the best of moods—with this news I left to see Ryleyev. That same evening my mother and sisters came to visit me from the country, and therefore I could not stay at the meeting. Ryleyev promised to tell me about everything.

The next morning, having transmitted to me a few feeble hopes, Ryleyev went with me to Moller's and again we did not find him at home. Having promised to come and dine with me, Ryleyev asked me to find Moller and find out what he thought so as to take decisive measures.

I set off to Torson's home, and there we learned that Moller was with his uncle—a minister. We sent after him. He arrived, but was no longer the man with whom I had spoken the previous evening. At the first question concerning his plans he immediately retorted that he did not

intend to be a tool and a toy of others in an affair which could cost our heads, and then, without listening to our arguments, left.

At dinner I told Ryleyev of our failure.

"We will have to learn something about the Finlandsky Regiment," he said. "Let's go to Repin's."[6]

We went, found him with difficulty, brought him back to my home, and here is what he had to say about the mood in the Finlandsky Regiment.

"Moller and Tulubyev, who that very morning had enthusiastically given their word, now both refused: Moller on the basis of his own calculations, Tulubyev following him: 'I cannot guarantee a single soldier; my company is not here but with the battalion in the country, and, moreover, I have decided to retire on the grounds of ill health. In the whole regiment there is only Rozen who can answer for himself, but I do not know what he will be able to do.' "

Ryleyev departed, having promised to return that evening and inform us about the final plans for the actions to be taken the following day.

Repin remained with me. Torson and Batenkov increased our company. At 10 o'clock that evening Ryleyev arrived with Pushchin and told us what had been decided at the meeting, that the next day, when the oath of allegiance was to be taken, we were to bring out the troops on whom we felt we could rely, and, however small the forces we brought out onto the square, to go with them immediately to the palace.

"It is necessary to deliver the first stroke," he said, "and then a confusion will provide a new chance to act; and so either your brother Mikhail with his company, or Arbuzov or Sutgof,[7] whoever comes to the square the first, will go to the palace."

At this point Repin pointed out to Ryleyev that the palace was too large and had too many exits to be taken by one company; that, in the event, the Preobrazhensky Battalion, which was quartered by the palace, could be introduced into the palace at the necessary moment by way of the Hermitage,[8] and that the gallant company would be in too dangerous a position; but even without this its success was not certain to prevent the departure of the royal family.

"If," he went on, "it is necessary, then it would not be a bad idea to obtain a plan of the palace and determine the course of action accordingly in order to use our small

numbers effectively."

"We do not think," said Ryleyev, "that everything can be concluded simply by taking the palace, but it will suffice if Nicholas and the royal family depart, and the confusion leave his party without a leader. Then all the Guards will join us, and the most undecided will have to incline to our side. I repeat that the success of the revolution depends on one thing: Dare!"

So ended the evening before the events of 14 December...

"THE CIRCUMSTANCES THEMSELVES WILL SUMMON THE SOCIETY TO ACT."

Kondratii Ryleyev about Preparations for the Insurrection on 14 December 1825. From his Testimony Before the Committee of Enquiry[1]

I learned that the late sovereign was ill on the eve of the oath of allegiance to His Highness the Cesarevich [Constantine.—*Comp.*], at the home of Countess Lavalle,[2] from Trubetskoy. He further added: "they say his state is critical, we should meet together somewhere." I suggested Obolensky's, and we agreed to meet there the following day, but did not have time to do so and, as I said earlier, Yakubovich and his news about the death of the late sovereign found me in my sickbed, and shortly thereafter came the oath of allegiance, and not only was it impossible to take any measures, but even to hold a meeting on the question. Shortly afterwards Trubetskoy arrived and told me how readily all the regiments had taken their oath to the Cesarevich; that, however, this was not a disaster, that it was necessary to hold ourselves in readiness as far as we could, in order to support the southern members should they come out in revolt, which could well happen, for they were prepared to use any occasion; that now the circumstances were exceptional and decisive for our plans. As a result of this conversation, I proposed to some of the members who came to see me that same morning that Trubetskoy be elected dictator. All expressed their agreement with this, and from that moment began our daily and conclusive meetings...

Trubetskoy was the first to bring me the news that His

Highness the Cesarevich was renouncing the throne—and it was decided that we must make use of this event; if the rumour proved unfounded, then we would wait to see what they did in the south. Later we definitely decided that, if the Cesarevich did accept the crown, we would declare the Society dissolved and act as cautiously as we could, trying in the course of two or even three years to occupy the most important positions in the Guards regiments. That was Trubetskoy's opinion, to which I said that, if such was the case, we ought to recommend to the members that they not retire and not transfer [from the Guards.—*Comp.*] to the army. This was also supported by both Trubetskoy and Obolensky.

Thereafter my apartment indeed became a meeting place, a gathering of conspirators, whence emerged all the preparations and instructions for disturbance; but this happened by accident, as a result of my illness, which made it impossible for me to go out...

At the meeting to discuss the means of bringing out the soldiers, I suggested that it would be useful to spread the rumour that the Senate possessed the last will and testament of the late sovereign, in which the length of army service for the lower ranks was reduced by ten years. This suggestion was accepted unanimously by both Trubetskoy and all the other members, and it was decided that the officers of various regiments belonging to the Society should carry this out. Not only I and Obolensky, but almost everyone except Shchepin-Rostovsky considered six regiments to be sufficient to achieve the aim of the Society. At the time we felt we could rely only on the Grenadiers and Moscow regiments and the Guards Naval Crew, Trubetskoy did indeed once express doubt in a conversation with me, for, he said, it was unbelievable that all the companies would follow the example of a few. I, on the other hand, thought that it was sufficient, by reason of their indignation at their exacting commanders, that each regiment should have one resolute captain to rouse the lower ranks, and when I asked Trubetskoy what force he thought sufficient to carry out our plans, he answered: "One regiment is enough." On hearing this I said to him: "Then we have nothing to worry about; we can, in all probability, be certain of two or three." Later, when, in addition to the ones named above, we began to count upon the Izmailovsky, Finlandsky and Chasseur regiments, then everyone without exception said that the circumstances themselves were

calling upon the Society to act, and that not to avail ourselves of them with such a considerable force would be unforgivable cowardice, and even a crime...

It was decided to seize the imperial family and hold it until the convening of a Grand Council[3] whose duty it would be to decide who was to reign and on what conditions. Consequently Trubetskoy assigned me the task of writing a manifesto to the people in the name of the Senate, in which I was to explain that the Cesarevich and the now reigning monarch had renounced the throne, that after such an act on their part, the Senate had found it necessary to detain the imperial family and convene a Grand Council of popular representatives from all the social estates of the population whose task it would be to decide the fate of the nation. To this it was also necessary to add, so that the people should remain calm, that property, both that of the state and that of private individuals, would remain inviolable, that for the preservation of the social system the Senate was transferring executive power to the Provisional Government, to which were appointed Admiral Mordvinov, Privy Councillor Speransky and others. A manifesto having these contents was written by Baron Steingel, to whom I entrusted my commission, as I considered him more able than myself to draft an act of such a nature.

On the evening of 13 December I indeed suggested to Kakhovsky that he assassinate the present emperor, and I said that this could be done on the square, but who else was present I do not recall. On the morning of that same day, after long reflections on the plan for our undertaking, I found many impediments to its happy conclusion. Most of all I asked myself whether, if we did not succeed in seizing the present emperor, there would inevitably be a civil war. At that point it occurred to me that, in order to avoid such civil strife, he must be sacrificed, and this thought was the reason for my evil proposition.

I repeat, I never spoke of assassinating the whole of the imperial family and proclaiming a republic. The seizure of the palace was the task of Yakubovich and Arbuzov, to which Trubetskoy had agreed. The occupation of the fortress and other places was to take place, according to Trubetskoy's plan, after the imperial family had been taken. As to any other military instructions, I do not know. At one of the meetings Trubetskoy named Obolensky as his chief-of-staff; perhaps the latter received instructions from him. I also know that, in the case of

failure, we were to retreat to the settlements...[4]

Finally, in order to clear my conscience completely, I must admit that, after I had learned of the plans of Yakubovich and Kakhovsky, I also often thought that, in order to ensure the stability of the new order, it would be necessary to kill the whole of the royal family. I fancied that the murder of the emperor alone would not only be of no benefit, but, on the contrary, might be fatal for the very aim of the Society; that it would divide minds, create parties, arouse the supporters of this most august family, and that all of this together would unavoidably give rise to civil conflict and all the horrors of a popular revolution. With the execution of the whole of the imperial family, however, I thought all parties would inevitably unite or, at least, it would be possible to calm them. However this criminal idea, as far as I can remember, I revealed to no one, and I myself finally returned to my original view that the fate of the ruling house, as also the nature of government to be introduced into Russia, should be decided by the Grand Council, which opinion I sought constantly to impress upon all the members known to me.

"I WAS THROWN INTO CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION."

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Plan of the Insurrection and Preparations for It. From the Testimony of S. Trubetskoy[1]

...This was my plan. I proposed that, if the regiments refused to take the oath, then they were to be gathered together somewhere in one place and wait to see what measures were taken by the government; I hoped that, if their number was sufficiently large, then force would not be used to compel them to submit; and in order to learn our own strength, we should attempt to take the regiment in which men had refused to take the oath to another regiment close by in order to encourage that regiment to come out also, if it likewise refused or would refuse to take the oath. According to Ryleyev and Obolensky, from whom I had first had all my information, I supposed that the Izmailovsky, Finlandsky, Chasseur, Royal Grenadiers and Moscow regiments and the Naval Crew would not take the oath. I considered such a force

to be sufficient.

I was of the opinion that if, on the first day, [the government.—*Comp.*] did not enter into negotiations with them, then, seeing that they did not disperse but spent the first night in bivouacs, they would undoubtedly enter upon negotiations the next day, or would announce that they had sent to Warsaw to the Cesarevich. In the meantime it would be impossible to refuse provisions to these regiments; and then, if indeed a courier had been sent to Warsaw, we would await the outcome and, if His Highness the Cesarevich agreed to come, then we would submit to the situation. If, however, the Cesarevich did not come or, which I supposed more likely, they entered into negotiations with the regiments, then we would tell the soldiers that there existed a last will and testament left by the late emperor of blessed memory, according to which their length of military service was to be reduced, that they must demand the fulfillment of this testament, that it was impossible to rely on this testament alone but that they must also act forcefully, and to this end convince them not to disperse, for if they did not disperse, then everything would be achieved. Then we would demand everything written in the paper* which is now in the hands of the Committee, and that all of this be proclaimed in a manifesto issued by the Senate. We would also demand that a suitable place be found for the regiments to make camp until the business was settled. I did not doubt, that by this time many other regiments would have joined them, and even that many people in every place would support their demands. This was based on the belief that there are probably many people who desire a constitutional monarchy, but who do not publicise their opinion, not seeing any possibility of realising it, but when that possibility [appeared.—*Comp.*] and, moreover, the insurgent troops did not engage in any disorders, they would side with them. I did not fear that other regiments might be compelled to act against them, but feared only the artillery, and for this reason considered it essential to approach it and bring it with us. Circumstances were to decide where it would be most convenient to deploy the regiments, but I preferred to deploy them outside the city, as then calm would be maintained in the city, and it would be easier to restrain the regiments themselves from disorder. We had no fear,

* A reference to the Manifesto to the Russian People.

as I have said, of the army regiments, for we did not believe that it would be possible to turn regiment against regiment. There was another suggestion, that we gather all the regiments on Senate Square and, as soon as negotiations began, demand from the Senate the last will and testament in which conscript service was reduced, and also the distribution of the manifesto, after which circumstances would determine where the regiments were to make camp in order not to disperse before the matter was settled. There were also those who thought that, if all of this did not succeed, then we should turn to the military settlements, join them and await the outcome. In general it was believed that the outcome would be as desired.

When I myself began to gather information from the officers about the mood in the regiments, and enquired as to the number of members in the Society itself, I discovered that the mood did not furnish hope for the successful execution and that the Society was composed of the most insignificant individuals. However, I also saw that there were many who were beginning to become impatient, once Ryleyev himself told me that they were demanding to begin before the proposed time; I, meanwhile, knew that there were some who wanted to bring out the regiments on the day that the oath was to be taken to the Cesarevich. I was thrown into considerable confusion. I heard that some were saying that it would be possible to do everything with just a handful of soldiers, even to penetrate the palace, but at this Batenkov, who was then present, protested that the palace must be treated as sacrosanct, that if the soldiers laid hold of it, then the devil himself would not be able to restrain them. I am certain that these objections later prevented many disasters. I complained to Ryleyev about the spirit of revolt among the members, but he assured me that it would quieten. I am not a born killer; I wanted to withdraw, finding myself among people ready to kill;[2] but at the same time I supposed that I, or at least my name, had served to arouse to such actions, and I also hoped that, by remaining with them, and, as it were, their commander, I could prevent the evil, and should something happen, then persuade them not to engage in disorder and to preserve at least some semblance of lawfulness. But then, suddenly, we learned that the courier had returned from Warsaw earlier than I had calculated, I saw that the fervour of many had again become inflamed; some said that it was already impossible to retreat, as everything

might already have been discovered, and so they were doomed in any case. I still thought of helping in some way, persuading them that the officers should begin simply with the questions as to why they were being asked to take the oath, and only then, if they saw that the soldiers supported them, bring them out; and seeing that the company commanders present accepted this, with the exception of Arbuzov, who asserted confidently that he would bring them out, a degree of hope entered my heart that nothing would be forthcoming from the other regiments, except perhaps the Naval Crew. However, I left Ryleyev's in despair: I saw clearly that, by accepting the appearance of commander (although all the instructions came from Ryleyev, but in my name) and by giving my agreement to be with the insurgent regiments, I was making myself culpable of all that could follow therefrom; that by my arguments with these officers over the means, the manner of conducting the matter, I made them believe that I would not abandon them, and thereby exposed them further, if they were ready, or incited them, if they were not yet ready. I reproached myself with the fact that I had not represented to them the whole of the madness of such a plan; tortured by my conscience and the fear of imminent disasters, I saw that in any case I also must inevitably perish; but I decided, at least, not to have also on my conscience the fact of being among the insurgents. The oath was to be taken at 6 o'clock in the morning. Ryleyev told me that he would be leaving early to go to the Naval Crew; anguish of heart robbed me of sleep, at 7 o'clock I went to discover the whereabouts of Ryleyev and found him at home; I felt slightly relieved; I hoped that everything would pass quietly, but did not have the spirit to ask him about the Naval Crew. At 9 o'clock I learned that the Horse Guards had already taken the oath, and sent another message to Ryleyev, asking him to come to see me, wishing to be certain that he was at home, and indeed he came; then once again my heart was cheered, but I did not ask about the Crew, but said only that it seemed that everything was proceeding quietly. He was with Pushchin; the latter, on leaving, said: "But you will be on the square, should something happen?" I could not find it in me to say either yes or no, and answered: "Well, if just some two companies turn up, that may happen. It seems that everything will pass off quietly, many regiments have already taken the

oath." I was afraid that if, contrary to my hopes, there should be some disturbance, then they would come for me and therefore I went out...

MANIFESTO TO THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE[1]

...The Senate Manifesto proclaims:

1) That the former government is abolished.

2) That, until a permanent government is formed by election, a provisional government is established.

3) The freedom of publication, and therefore the abolition of censorship.

4) Freedom of religious practice for all creeds.

5) The abolition of the right of ownership of people.[2]

6) The equality of all social estates before the law...

7) The right of any citizen to engage in whatever profession he wishes, and therefore—the nobleman, the merchant, the trader and the peasant have equal right to enter military and civil service and the clergy, to engage in wholesale and retail trade, paying the fixed trading taxes; to acquire all kinds of property, that is: land, houses in villages or towns; to conclude all kinds of agreement amongst themselves; to take each other to court.

8) The liquidation of poll-taxes and outstanding payment of such taxes.[3]

9) The abolition of monopolies, that is: on salt, on the sale of strong wines and similar drinks, and therefore the introduction of free wine distillation and salt production, with the payment of an industrial tax according to the amount of salt and spirit produced.

10) The abolition of the military levy[4] [in its then existing form.—*Comp.*] and military settlements.

11) The reduction in the length of military service for the lower ranks [private soldiers.—*Comp.*], the obligation of military service being equally distributed among all social estates.

12) The demobilisation of all lower ranks, without exception, who have served for 15 years.

13) The creation of volost, uyezd, gubernia and regional administrations which are to replace all government officials...

14) Open courts.

15) The introduction of juries in criminal and civil courts.

[The Senate] establishes an administration of 2 or 3 persons,[5] to which are subordinate all sections of supreme government, i.e. ministries, the Council, the Committee of Ministers, the army, the fleet. In short—the whole of the supreme executive power, but neither the legislative nor the judicial. For this last there remains the ministry subordinate to the Provisional Government, but, for the judgement of cases not decided in the lower instances, there remains the Senate Criminal Department, and a Civil Department is established whose decisions are final and whose members will remain until the formation of a permanent government.

The Provisional Government is entrusted with the execution of the following:

1) The equalisation of the rights of all social estates.

2) The formation of local, volost, uyezd, gubernia and regional administrations.

3) The creation of an internal popular militia.

4) The creation of jury courts.

5) The equalisation of military service obligations among the social estates.

6) The abolition of the [former.—*Comp.*] regular army.

7) The establishment of the procedure for electing people's representatives to the Chamber, who shall approve the form of government and State Statutes.

"ALL OF THOSE PRESENT WERE READY TO ACT, ALL WERE IN A STATE OF EXALTATION, ALL HOPED FOR SUCCESS."

Andrei Rozen on the Insurrection of 14 December 1825. From His Reminiscences[1]

...On the evening of 12 December, I was invited to a meeting with Ryleyev and Prince Obolensky; there I found the chief participants of 14 December. It had been decided that on the day appointed for the taking of the new oath, we would gather on Senate Square, bring there as many troops as we could on the pretext of supporting the claims of Constantine, and entrust command of the troops to Prince Trubetskoy if Orlov[2] had not arrived from Moscow by that time. If the main force were on our side, then we would proclaim the throne abolished and immediately introduce a Provisional Government consist-

ing of five men to be elected by the members of the State Council. N. Mordvinov, M. Speransky and P. Pestel were already named as three of the five. The Provisional Government was to direct all state affairs with the help of the Council and the Senate until the elected persons of the whole of Russia could gather and decide upon the basis of the new government. Probably no one knew how many battalions or companies and from which regiments could be relied upon. Should the number be sufficient, it was decided to seize the palace, the main places of government, the banks and the post office in order to avoid any disorders. If the numbers should be small and the attempt fail, then we were to retreat to the military settlements in Novgorod Gubernia. The measures taken for the insurrection were imprecise and vague, which was why, in reply to some of my objections and comments, Prince Obolensky and Bulatov said: "But it's impossible to have a rehearsal!" All of those present were ready to act, all were in a state of exaltation, all hoped for success, and only one amongst all of them amazed me with his total self-sacrifice; he asked me privately whether it was possible to rely on the support of the 1st and 2nd battalions of our regiment; and when I represented to him all the obstacles, the difficulties, the virtual impossibility, then he, with a special expression on his face and in his voice, said to me: "Yes, there are few chances of success, but just the same we must begin; the beginning and the example will bring their fruit." The sounds and the intonation "just the same" still ring in my ears. This was said by Kondratii Ryleyev.

On 13 December, a Sunday, some of the regimental officers called to see me. To their question as to what the officer on duty should do on the day of the insurrection, I answered positively and briefly—that for the general safety and order he must keep to his appointed post... In the evening I received the private communication that the following day had been chosen for the taking of the oath. That night the orderly brought the regimental order, according to which all officers were instructed to meet at the apartment of the regimental commander at 7 o'clock in the morning. Sleep passed; with my wife I discussed the duties of a Christian, the forthcoming dangers, which we had talked about ceaselessly over the previous days; I was able to be completely frank with her—her mind and heart understood everything. Finally, we committed ourselves with a prayer to the will of God.

The hour of parting had come.

Before dawn on 14 December all the officers gathered at the home of the regimental commander who, having congratulated us on the accession of the new emperor, read out a letter containing the last will and testament of Alexander, the abdication of Constantine and the manifesto of Nicholas. In the presence of all the officers I stepped forward and asked the General why, if all that he had read in the letters and papers was in conformity with the originals, which I had no cause to doubt, had we not taken the oath to Nicholas on 27 November? The General, confused, replied: "You are misjudging—that has been considered by people more experienced and older than we are; gentlemen, you will now please go to your battalions for the taking of the oath."

Our 2nd Battalion, under Colonel Moller, was that day on guard duty in the Winter Palace and the 1st Department. Our 1st Battalion took the oath in the barracks, with the exception of my rifle troop, which the day before had been on guard duty in Galernaya Harbour[3] and had still not been relieved. We left the barracks to go to the palace to post our 2nd Battalion; the mounting of the guard took place without any parade. There was still not a single soldier on Senate Square. On returning home, I received a note from Ryleyev to tell me I was expected at the barracks of the Moscow Regiment. It was 10 o'clock in the morning, my horses were in harness. Having driven out as far as the Isaakiyevsky Bridge, I saw a dense crowd of people across on the other side, and on Senate Square—the Moscow Regiment in battle-square formation. I made my way through the crowd, went straight up to the square of troops drawn up on the other side of the monument, and was met with loud cries of "Hurrah!"

People were pouring into the square from every side; the police were silent. There were still no troops on the opposing side. I hurried on to the Finlandsky barracks, where there remained only our 1st Battalion, and to which my rifle troop had only just returned after being relieved of duty at the Galernaya Harbour. Our 2nd Battalion was on duty that day in the palace and the city, the 3rd Battalion was out in turns at its winter quarters in the country. I went to each company, ordered the soldiers to dress quickly, take ammunition and line up outside, saying that we must go to the assistance of our brothers. In half an hour the battalion was ready, the officers arrived; no one knew on what instructions the

battalion had been brought out. Adjutants [to the tsar.—*Comp.*] were constantly riding in, one of them going directly to the brigade commander, Golovin, with an order from the corps commander Voinov to march out the battalion. We set off in company formation; at the Naval Cadet building we were met by Adjutant-General Count Komarovsky, who was on horseback and who had been sent by the sovereign to bring our battalion. We were brought to a halt in the middle of Isaakiyevsky Bridge, beside the sentry-box; there we were ordered to load our rifles; with that most of the soldiers crossed themselves. Certain that my riflemen would obey, I decided first of all to make my way through the carabineer troop just ahead of me, and through a company from the Preobrazhensky Regiment under the command of Captain Titov, which occupied the whole width of the bridge on the Senate Square side.*

As soon as I realised, however, that the insurrection had no leader, and that consequently there could be no unity of action, and not wishing to sacrifice people in vain, and also not being in a position to remain in the ranks of the opposing side—I decided to halt my troop at the very moment when Count Komarovsky and my brigade commander issued the command "Forward!" to the whole of the battalion; my troop with one voice loudly called out: "Halt!", so that the carabineer troop standing in front of us wavered, then hesitated, not stepping forward, and it was only thanks to the personal efforts of Captain Vyatkin who, sparing neither his notorious oaths nor his powerful fists, that the first troop advanced. Our battalion commander, Colonel Tulubyev, disappeared, being summoned back to the barracks, where his family was quartered. The brigade commander came up to me twice in order to move my troop, but his arguments and threats availed nothing. During this time it was not only my rifle troop that I was holding back, for behind my men stood yet another three companies, six troops; but these companies did not obey their commanders, saying that the commander of the riflemen up ahead knew what he was doing. It was already the second hour of the afternoon; as the number of troops brought in to surround the insurgents increased, the police became bolder and dispersed the crowd from the square, the flow of people stretching onto Vasilyev-

* Troops loyal to the emperor.—*Transl.*

sky Island[4] along the sidewalks of the Isaakiyevsky Bridge. People—workers and *raznochintsy** coming from the square, asked me to hold out for another hour and assured me that all would be well...

For more than two hours I stood immobile, tormented by internal struggle, waiting for an attack on the square in order to support it with my three and a half companies or eight hundred soldiers, ready to follow me anywhere.

Meanwhile, on Senate Square, around eight hundred men from the Life-Guards of the Moscow Regiment stood in square formation: the company commanded by Mikhail Bestuzhev stood facing the Admiralteisky Boulevard; he was obliged to keep watch for three sides of the square, and the fourth, facing the St Isaac Cathedral, was under the command of the weary Prince Shchepin-Rostovsky. This circumstance enabled Bestuzhev to save two squadrons of Horse Guards who rode round the square and lined up at a distance of half a rifle-shot. The whole side of the square facing the Senate took aim in order to fire, but was stopped by Bestuzhev who, running out in front of them, commanded: "As you were!" A few bullets whistled past his ears and several Horse Guards fell from their horses.

Following the men of the Moscow Regiment, a battalion of the Guards Naval Crew[5] arrived, coming along Galernaya Street. When this battalion had been gathered in the barracks yard to take the oath, and several officers, having protested against the oath, were arrested by General Shipov, the brigade commander, Nikolai Bestuzhev had appeared at the gates of the barracks. At that very moment when the sound of rifle shots being fired against the Horse Guards attack could be heard coming from the square, he shouted to the soldiers: "Our men are being killed! Lads, follow me!" and everyone had rushed after him onto the square. In their haste they had forgotten to bring with them some of the weapons stored in the battalion arsenal, but everyone was hoping for support from the Guards Mounted Artillery. This battalion, having formed a column ready for attack, stood behind the square formed by the Life-Guards, behind the side facing the St Isaac Cathedral.

Then three companies of the Grenadiers Regiment arrived [to join the insurgents.—*Comp.*], brought out by

* Intellectuals not belonging to the gentry in 19th-century Russia.—*Transl.*

Lieutenant Alexander Sutgof, battalion adjutant Nikolai Panov and Second Lieutenant Nil Kozhevnikov. Having run across the Neva, they entered the courtyard of the Winter Palace, where Colonel Gerua was already in position with a battalion of Guards Sappers. Commandant Bashutsky praised the zeal of the Grenadiers in defending the throne, but the men, realising their mistake, shouted out "Not ours!", and, turning in a half circle by the courtyard, came out from the palace, passing by the sovereign, who asked them: "Where are you going? If for me, then to the right, if not, then to the left!" Someone answered: "To the left!", and all ran out onto Senate Square in disorder and were taken inside the square formed by the Moscow Regiment in order to count them and line them up in companies, but this had not been completed before the artillery moved into action. However, I should point out that Sutgof brought out his company in full battle dress, with a small supply of bread, having warned his men of the forthcoming action.

Altogether, the ranks of the insurgents on Senate Square included more than 2,000 soldiers.[6] In view of the thousands of people who had gathered around them, ready to act, this force, in the hands of one commander, could have decided everything, and all the more easily as when offensive action was taken, many of the battalions would have joined the insurgents who, in 10 degree of frost, with falling snow and an easterly wind, wearing only their dress uniforms, resigned themselves to this painful situation and warmed themselves exclusively with constant cries of "Hurrah!". There was no sign of the dictator. Bulatov was proposed: he refused; Bestuzhev was proposed: he, as a sailor, refused; finally they thrust the leadership on Prince Obolensky, not as a tactician but as an officer known and loved by the soldiers. This was lack of leadership in the full sense of the word: without any instructions—everyone commanded, everyone waited for something and, while waiting, beat off attacks, stubbornly refusing to capitulate and proudly rejecting the proferred clemency.

Gradually depending on the distance between the barracks and the palace, the troops of the opposing side began to gather... When the troops had been deployed in such a way that the insurgents were surrounded by thick columns on every side, only a few people remained on the square, and the police had already began to move them more insistently from Admiralteiskaya Square and

Dvortsovaya Square,[7] where the emperor himself, on horseback, ordered and persuaded them to return to their homes so as not to impede the movement of the troops.

A December day soon draws to a close: as the third hour ends, dusk begins; doubtless the crowd dispersed by the police would have poured back; very probably more troops would have joined. The emperor was long in deciding to use the *ultima ratio rerum* [the final reasoning of kings.—*Comp.*], but he saw that he could delay no longer and was obliged to have recourse to this measure when Count Karl Tol,[8] who arrived in St Petersburg that day, following Grand Prince Mikhail, said to him: "Sire, faites balayer la place par la mitraille ou renoncez au trône". ["Sire, sweep the square with grape shot, or renounce the throne."] The sovereign could never forgive him this proposition, although he did not overlook his useful service, his proven knowledge and abilities as a commander.

The first cannon report, blank shot, roared out, and in reply came "Hurrah!"—the second and third cannon-balls fell, one penetrating the wall of the Senate, the other following a curve that took it from the corner of the Senate to the Academy of Arts. The insurgents once again replied with a loud and resonant cry of "Hurrah!". Grape shot was loaded; Colonel Nesterovsky lined up the cannon, and the sovereign himself commanded "Fire one!", but the feuerweker with the slow-match began to cross himself; again the same voice could be heard crying "Fire one!", and then Lieutenant Ilya Bakunin applied the slow-match; in a moment the grape shot hailed down on the tightly-packed square formation. The insurgents scattered down Galernaya Street and along the Neva to the Academy of Arts. The cannon moved forward and fired again, one along Galernaya, the other across the Neva. With this second totally unnecessary blast of grape shot, the number of killed was quadrupled, guilty and innocent, soldiers and civilians, particularly in the narrow passage of Galernaya Street. Three sides of the square formed by the Moscow Regiment ran after Mikhail Bestuzhev to the embankment, grape shot followed them; at the Neva he wanted to line the men up in sections, but the cannon-shot fired from the corner of the Isaakiyevsky Bridge cracked the ice and many people drowned; had it not been for this circumstance, Bestuzhev might perhaps have succeeded in taking the SS Peter and Paul Fortress. The Royal Grenadiers, the Guards Naval Crew

and the fourth side of the Moscow Regiment battle square ran along Galernaya Street, where cannon had been brought and the soldiers were mown down by lengthwise firing...

It seems almost incredible that not one of my colleagues was killed or wounded; the greatcoats and fur coats of many were pierced by grape shot. As a result of the cannon shot fired against the third attack of the Horse Guards, one bullet shot the left tassel from the braid on my shako and forced one line of riflemen to lean their heads to one side; a joker noticed this and said: "Why are you all bowing your heads not forwards but to one side?" In particular, whole ranks of soldiers fell in the Guards Naval Crew; the officers were unhurt... When the square had been cleared of insurgents, the Horse Guards turned to the Isaakiyevsky Bridge across to Vasilyevsky Island. I issued the order to wheel left and halted the troop by the riding school of the 1st Cadet Corps. When the regimental commander arrived from the palace, I was ordered to take my troop to the courtyard of the director of all the corps...

The regimental chaplain arrived; I was ordered to leave my men. I saw that the soldiers had formed a tight circle, the chaplain began to question them and prepare them to take the oath; then I quickly broke into the circle and loudly, so that all could hear, told the chaplain that my soldiers had done nothing wrong, they had obeyed their commander. My troop took the oath. The stars were shining in the sky, and on the ground camp fires glowed in various directions... Patrols were constantly passing, both on horseback and on foot... During the night Senate Square was cleaned, together with Galernaya Street and the road across the Neva; the wounded were taken to the military hospital, various items of clothing were found by the holes in the ice. The next day I saw my wife for two hours, so as to say farewell for a long time...

"THE DIE WAS CAST ... ONLY ONE THING WAS LEFT: TO STAND FIRM, DEFEND THEMSELVES AND AWAIT THE OUTCOME."

From the Reminiscences of Vladimir Steingel[1]

Vladimir Steingel (1783-1862), a baron, was a retired naval lieutenant-captain, a member of the Northern Society, and had taken part in the war of 1812 and the campaigns abroad. He was accepted into the Secret Society by Kondratii Ryleyev. Differing from the majority of the young Decembrists in being very experienced, Steingel, like the other members of the Decembrist movement, lived in a highly cultured environment. He was interested in works of a legal and political nature, devoted considerable time to the study of literature and history, and published historical essays. Steingel was actively involved in the preparations for the insurrection of 14 December 1825. The Supreme Criminal Court sentenced him to penal servitude for life; later this was commuted to 15 years, to be followed by "permanent exile in Siberia". On returning home after the amnesty of 1856, Steingel continued to take a lively interest in political events and wrote for newspapers and journals of the day. He was the author of memoirs on the Decembrist movement.

At last the fatal day of 14 December dawned—a remarkable date. It was a gloomy December St Petersburg morning, 8° below zero. The whole of the governing Senate arrived at the palace before nine in the morning. Here, and in all the Guards regiments the oath was being taken. Couriers were constantly riding into the palace with reports on how the matter was proceeding. Everything appeared to be calm. A few mysterious individuals appeared on Senate Square, clearly agitated... At about 10 o'clock, a drum roll suddenly sounded on Gorokhov Avenue, together with repeated shouts of "Hurrah!" The Moscow Regiment, with its banner and led by Staff-Captain Shchepin-Rostovsky and the two Bestuzhevs,[2] emerged onto Admiralteiskaya Square and turned towards the Senate, where it drew up in battle-square formation. Shortly afterwards the Guards Naval Crew rapidly joined it, brought by Arbuzov, and then a battery of Royal Grenadiers brought out by their adjutant and lieutenant, Sutgof. A crowd of people came running up, and immediately seized upon a stack of firewood by the fence around the St Isaac Cathedral construction site. The Admiralteisky Boulevard filled with spectators...

The first victim to fall was Count Miloradovich, who

had emerged unscathed from so many battles. The insurgents had only just formed a square when he came driving out of the palace on a sledge pulled by two horses, standing upright and wearing only his dress uniform with a blue ribbon. We could hear how, holding onto the driver's shoulder with his left hand and pointing with his right, he ordered him: "Drive around the church and then right to the barracks." Barely three minutes had passed when he returned on horseback to the battle square, and began to persuade the soldiers to take the oath to the new emperor. Suddenly there was a rifle shot, the Count swayed, his hat fell off, he collapsed onto his saddle, and in this position the horse bore him to the house of the officer to whom it belonged. Exhorting the soldiers with the assurance of an old father-commander, the Count had said that he himself would have been happy to see Constantine emperor, but what was to be done if he had abdicated; he assured them that he had seen the new abdication and sought to persuade them to believe him. One of the members of the Secret Society, Prince Obolensky, realising that such a speech might have its effect, came out of the square and began to tell the Count to leave for his own safety. Noticing that the Count did not pay him any attention, he wounded him slightly in the side. At that moment the Count wheeled round, and Kakhovsky fired the lethal shot at him with his pistol. When, in the barracks, they took him from the horse and carried him into the apartment of the officer already referred to, he had the last consolation of reading a note written personally by his new sovereign's hand expressing his regrets—at 4 o'clock that afternoon he passed away.

It was now that the importance of the insurrection, which bound the insurgents, so to speak, to the position they had taken up, fully revealed itself. Lacking the strength to advance, they saw that there was no retreat. The die was cast. The dictator failed to arrive. Dissension arose in the battle square. Only one thing was left: to stand firm, defend themselves and await the outcome. This was what they did.

In the meantime, on the orders of the new emperor, columns of loyal troops immediately gathered and moved to the palace. The sovereign, disregarding the pleas of the empress and the representations of his zealous advisors, went out himself, holding in his arms the 7-year-old heir to the throne[3] and entrusted him to the protection of

the Preobrazhensky Guards. The effect of this scene was tremendous: the troops were delighted, the capital was filled with pleasant promising surprise. Then the sovereign mounted a white horse and rode out in front of the first troop, moving the column from the exercise-house to the boulevard. His majestic, although a little gloomy calm attracted everyone's attention. At that time the insurgents were encouraged by the approach of the Finlandsky Regiment, whose sympathy they still relied upon. This regiment was marching across the Isaakiyevsky Bridge. It was being taken to join others who had taken the oath, but the commander of the 1st Troop, Baron Rozen, having reached the middle of the bridge, called out "Halt!" The entire regiment came to a halt, and no one was able to move it until the drama was over. Only that part which had not reached the bridge crossed the ice onto the Angliiskaya Embankment, and there joined the [government.—*Comp.*] troops, having come round the insurgents from the direction of the Kryukov Canal.

Shortly after the sovereign had ridden out into Admiralteiskaya Square, a stately officer of the Dragoons with a black kerchief around his head under his hat* went up to him, saluting, and, having said a few words, he walked over to the battle square, but soon returned, having gained nothing. He had offered to dissuade the insurgents, and had received one offensive reproach. He was immediately arrested on the order of the sovereign, and shared the common fate of the condemned.[4] Then General Voinov approached the insurgents, and Wilhelm Küchelbecker, a poet and the publisher of the journal *Mnemosina*,[5] who was in the battle square, shot at him with his pistol and thus forced him to withdraw... Colonel Sturler approached the Royal-Grenadiers, and that same Kakhovsky shot and wounded him. Finally Grand Prince Mikhail himself drove up, but also without success. They told him that they wanted, at last, the rule of law. And with that, a pistol aimed at him by the hand of the same Küchelbecker obliged him to retreat. The pistol was already loaded.

* This was Yakubovich, who had come from the Caucasus, a man with a gift for words who won popularity in the salons with tales of his heroic exploits. Among liberals he did not hide his dissatisfaction and hatred for the late sovereign, and during the 17-day period the members of the Secret Society were convinced that, as soon as it was possible, he would "show himself".—*Comment by V. Steingel.*

After this failure, Serafim, the metropolitan bishop, wearing his vestments and carrying a cross, came out of the St Isaac Church[6] temporarily located in the Admiralty building. He went up to the battle square and began to exhort them. Another Küchelbecker[7] came up to him, a brother of the one who had forced Grand Prince Mikhail to leave. A sailor and a Lutheran, he did not know the titles of Orthodox address, and therefore said, simply but with conviction: "Go back, Father, it's not your business to get mixed up in this." The metropolitan bishop turned his steps towards the Admiralty...

When the whole process of seeking to resolve the situation by peaceful means had been exhausted, they moved to the use of weapons. Twice General Orlov fearlessly led his Horse Guards into the attack, but the volleys fired by the troop ranks threw the attacks back. However, though he did not defeat the square, he won a whole fictitious county.[8] The sovereign, slowly advancing with his columns was already closer to the centre of the Admiralty. At the north-east corner of Admiralteisky Boulevard appeared the *ultima ratio*—the weapons of the Guards artillery. Their commander, General Sukhozanet, rode up to the square and shouted to the soldiers to put down their arms, or else he would fire grape shot. He himself had a rifle levelled at him, but then a scornfully commanding voice was heard coming from the square: "Don't touch him... he isn't worth a bullet". This, of course, offended him grievously. Having ridden back to the battery, he ordered blank shot to be fired: it had no effect! Then the grape shot whistled through the air; with that everything moved and scattered in every direction, except those who had fallen. It could thus have ended, but Sukhozanet ordered several more shots to be fired along the narrow Galernaya Street and across the Neva in the direction of the Academy of Arts, whither was running a crowd made up, for the most part, of the curious.

Thus this accession to the throne was also stained with blood. The reign of Alexander both began and ended with what will forever be remembered as an evil deed unpunished, and merciless vengeance on a necessary and noble uprising[9]—open and with total self-sacrifice.

The troops were sent back to their barracks. Cadets mounted guard on Isaakiyevskaya and Petrovskaya Squares. Many bonfires were lit, in the light of which the wounded and the dead were removed throughout the

whole of the night and the blood was washed from the square. But a stain of this kind cannot be washed from the pages of history. All was done in secret, and the actual number of dead and wounded remained unknown. Rumours about the losses were, as a rule, exaggerated. The bodies were thrown into the holes in the ice; it was said that many were thrown in still half alive.

That same evening many arrests were carried out. Of the first to be taken were: Ryleyev, Prince Obolensky and the two Bestuzhevs. All were incarcerated in the fortress. Most of those arrested the following day were taken to the palace, some even with their hands bound, and brought personally before the emperor, which enabled Nikolai Bestuzhev to say later to one of the adjutant-generals on duty that the palace had been turned into a police station.

THE SOLDIERS "WITH EXTRAORDINARY ENERGY ... REMAINED UNSHAKABLE AND ... STOOD IN THEIR RANKS AS IF ON PARADE."

From the Reminiscences of Mikhail Bestuzhev[1]

We had been standing in position for more than 2 hours, and no troops had appeared against us. The first that we saw were the Horse Guards, who approached from the right quietly in ranks of three, keeping close to Admiralteisky Boulevard and, having turned to the right, lined up with their backs to the Admiralty and their right flank to the Neva. Then the Preobrazhensky troops appeared, coming from Dvortsovaya Square, with the artillery in front, for which they had either forgotten, or had not had time to collect the ammunition, for which they then had to send. The amunition arrived towards evening. The first battalion of the Preobrazhensky troops, having passed to the rear of the Horse Guards, closed off the exit from Isaakiyevsky Bridge. The Horse Pioneers, having followed the same route, closed off the exit to the Angliiskaya Embankment. The Pavlovsky Regiment stood with its back to the house of Lobanov-Rostovsky, the Semyonovsky Regiment—the length of the Horse Guards riding school; the Izmailovsky Regiment came to a halt on the street created after the Lobanov House had been built. Other regiments were de-

ployed along the main roads leading to the squares: Dvortsovaya, Isaakiyevskaya and Petrovskaya. The troops were not brought and deployed together, but at long intervals and with considerable bustle. Thus the men of the Izmailovsky Regiment, having resolutely refused to take the oath to Nicholas, and having beaten Rostovtsev, who had thought to try to persuade them, were brought out against troops whom they were waiting, at the first opportunity, to join. The new emperor, as the patron of this regiment, having greeted them three times with the cry: "Greetings, men!" and having not even received the standard reply, retired in confusion, and this regiment was left to stand opposite us until evening. The men of the Preobrazhensky Regiment, deployed opposite us near the Isaakiyevsky Bridge, were also left until evening, although Chevkin[2] had convinced them not to take the oath to Nicholas. The Horse Guards, sent three times to attack us and succeeding only on the third attempt to reach the Senate and line up with their backs to it, were also left there until evening, and this regiment had been so well prepared by the members of our Society serving in it that, if our regiment had made any move, it would undoubtedly have joined it. They, like the men of the Preobrazhensky Regiment, communicated their intentions to us through the crowd surrounding the battle square...

Shortly afterwards a squadron of Horse Guards left its ranks and galloped across to us. It was met with a hail of stones from the pavement and pieces of wood found behind the fence by the St Isaac Church. The riders, who had attacked unwillingly and without spirit, returned in disorder to their own ranks. The Moscow Regiment battle square held off the second and third attacks with calm stoicism, without any assistance from the crowd. After the defeat of the third attack, the Horse Guards rode towards the Senate and, when they began to line up, the soldiers in my side of the square, thinking that they were about to attack from that side, immediately took aim and wanted to open fire, which would probably have brought them all down to the last man. I, forgetful of the danger, ran out in front and ordered: "As you were!"

The soldiers lowered their rifles, but a few bullets whistled past my ears, and a few Horse Guards fell from their horses. A little later the Horse Pioneers, on heaven knows what instructions, came galloping past my side of

the square and the Horse Guards. My soldiers opened running fire on them and forced them to retreat. I was on the other side and could not avert or stop it. However tragic, these two incidents yielded happy results for us. The shots were heard in the Guards barracks and support hurried to our assistance...[3]

Totally unexpected help was also on its way. I walked along my side of the square, facing the Neva, and saw cadets of the Naval and the 1st Cadet Corps approaching.

"We have been sent as deputies from our corps in order to request permission to come out onto the square and fight in your ranks," said one of them breathlessly.

I could not prevent a smile, and for a moment the thought of granting them permission crossed my mind. The presence of these young fledglings on the square, standing alongside bewhiskered grenadiers, would indeed have given a touch of the original to our uprising. The participation of children in an insurrection would be a unique, unprecedented fact in the chronicles of history. But I restrained myself from giving way to this temptation at the thought of placing the lives and futures of these child-heroes at risk.

"Thank your comrades for their noble intention and preserve yourselves for future exploits," I answered seriously, and they departed...

The day was overcast, the wind was cold. The soldiers, wearing dress uniform since 5 o'clock that morning, had been standing on the square for more than 7 hours. We were surrounded by troops on all sides—without a main leader (because dictator Trubetskoy had not appeared), without artillery, without cavalry, deprived of all moral and physical support for the courage of the soldiers. With extraordinary energy they remained unshakable and, shivering with cold, stood in their ranks as if on parade...

Küchelbecker and Pushchin were trying to persuade the crowd to clear the square because we were about to be fired on. I joined them, but all my arguments met with one response: we will die with you. Sukhozanet rode up to us and communicated the latest order of the tsar: that we lay down our arms, or we would be fired on.

"Ride back," we shouted, and Pushchin added: "And send someone nobler than yourself."

As he rode back to the battery, he pulled the feather out of his hat, which had been agreed upon as the signal to open fire, and the shots rang out. The grape shot was aimed over our heads. The crowd of people did not stir.

The next cannonade—into the very centre of the crowd—cut down many innocent bystanders, and the rest scattered in all directions. I ran up to my side of the square, facing the Neva. The third cannonade followed. Many soldiers in my company fell and were groaning, rolling on the ground in their death agony. The others ran towards the Neva. I ran and overtook them. "Follow me, lads!" I cried to the men of the Moscow Regiment, and made my way down to the river. In the middle of the river I halted the soldiers, and with the help of my marvellous junior officers I lined up a closely-packed column, intending to march along the ice of the Neva as far as the SS Peter and Paul Fortress, and occupy it. If this had succeeded, we would have had a fine point d'appui [stronghold.—*Comp.*], where all our supporters could have gathered, and from which we could have commenced talks with Nicholas with cannon trained on the palace. I had already lined up three troops when a cannon-ball thundered past, struck the ice and rebounded along the river. I looked back to see where the shot had come from, and by the smoke from the cannon saw the battery drawn up roughly in the middle of the Isaakiyevsky Bridge. I continued to line up the column, although the cannon shots tore from it now a row to the right, now one to the left. The soldiers did not lose heart, and even the old men laughed at the younger ones, saying, when they ducked as the cannon-shot screamed past:

"Why are you bowing? Are you acquainted?"

I was already lining up the tail of the column, when suddenly I heard the shout: "We're drowning!" I saw a huge hole into which the soldiers were stumbling and drowning. The ice had been unable to withstand the weight of the soldiers and the cannon-shot and had broken up. The soldiers ran for the bank and arrived directly in front of the Academy of Arts.

"Where do we go now?" asked the standard-bearer. I glanced inside the open gates of the Academy and saw the round courtyard I remembered so well. I recalled the rooms of ancient sculptures, of paintings and the like which surrounded the courtyard and—immediately thinking that, if we occupied those rooms, we could defend ourselves for some time—called out: "Over here, lads!" The leading group of soldiers ran through the gates past the speechless door-keeper who, however, having recovered from his fright, lowered the weights and the gates swung to before our very noses. I ordered the men to get

a log from the bottom of a wrecked barge on the river in order to knock the gates from their hinges. The lads set about the business; the gates were already creaking under their blows, but we then saw a squadron of Cavalier-guards charging us at full speed. The soldiers lost heart. Can one think of resistance in such confusion, when everyone is crowded together in disorder?

"Run for safety, lads, as best you can!" and the soldiers ran off in every direction. I went up to the standard-bearer, embraced him and said:

"Tell your fellows in the Moscow Regiment that I, through you, am saying my final farewell. You take this banner and hand it to that officer who is riding in front; by doing that you will avoid punishment..."

I stood a while longer, saw how, having reached the middle of Rumyantsev Square, the standard-bearer went up to the officer and handed him the banner, and how the officer cut him down. The standard-bearer fell to the ground, and I almost burst into tears. I have forgotten the name of this degenerate hero, but I recall that it began with "von" and that, when he threw down at the emperor's feet the banner taken on the field of battle, he was awarded the Order of St Vladimir for courage!!

Having slowly made my way through the side-streets to the peaceful home of my sisters, I felt the feverish excitement gradually quieten inside me, and a weight that had been oppressing my soul was lifted. Somehow I seemed to breathe easily, my conscience was calm. I knew that I had fulfilled my duty irreproachably...

"I STOOD BETWEEN THE MOSCOW BATTLE SQUARE AND THE COLUMN OF THE GUARDS NAVAL CREW ... REPEATING THE WORDS OF RYLEYEV, THAT WE WERE BREATHING FREEDOM."

From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Bestuzhev[1]

My sword had long been sheathed, and I stood between the Moscow battle square and the column of the Guards Naval Crew, my hat pulled down and my hands clenched, repeating the words of Ryleyev, that we were breathing freedom. I saw with sorrow that this breath was restricted. Our freedom and the shouts of the soldiers resembled groans or the croak of the dying. Indeed: we

were surrounded on every side; inaction inflicted a paralysis of the mind; the spirit flagged, for he who halts upon his chosen path is already half-defeated. Furthermore, a piercing wind froze the blood in the veins of the soldiers and officers standing for so long in an exposed position. Attacks on us and our fusillades had ceased; the "Hurrah!" of the soldiers sounded less frequently and more feebly. The day was ending. Suddenly we saw that the regiments opposing us had divided, and the artillery battery took up its position between us, dully illuminated in the dusk.

The metropolitan bishop, sent to exhort us, had returned without success; to Sukhozanet who, having ridden up to us, then pointed to the artillery, we had shouted "Villain!"—and that had been the last surge, the last effort of our independence.

The first cannon fired, the grape shot showered down; some of the shots struck the road and raised clouds of snow and dust, some cut down a few ranks in the formation, and some whistled overhead and found its victims among the people who crowded between the columns of the Senate building and on the roofs of the neighbouring houses. Broken window-panes tinkled as they fell to the ground, but the people who fell in their wake sprawled silently and motionlessly, as if turned to stone. With the first shot, seven men standing beside me fell; I did not hear a single sigh, did not see one spasm—so lethal was the shot at this distance. Total silence reigned between the living and the dead. The second and third shots brought down a large number of soldiers and of ordinary civilians who had been crowding about us. I stood in exactly the same position, looked sadly into the eyes of death and awaited the fatal blow: at that moment life was so bitter that death appeared to me as a blessing. However, fate decided otherwise.

With the fifth and sixth shots the column moved, and when I looked round—between myself and those running there was already the whole square and hundreds of victims cut down by grape shot as they defended freedom. I had to follow the general movement, and with a death-like feeling in my soul I made my way through the corpses; here there was no movement, no cry, no groan, but in the intervals between the firing I could hear the blood trickling down the pavement, still hot enough to melt the snow, and then, scarlet, itself freezing.

A squadron of Horse Guards moved after us, and

when, on entering the narrow Galernaya Street, the fleeing people were crowded together, I caught up with the Royal-Grenadiers in the rear, and found my brother Alexander; here we stopped a few dozen men so that, should the cavalry charge, we could repell them and cover the retreat, but the emperor preferred to continue firing down the long and narrow street.

Grape shot followed us more successfully than horses could, and the troop we had formed dispersed. Dead bodies of soldiers and civilians kept falling down at every step; the soldiers ran into the houses, knocked on gates, tried to take shelter behind the plinths, but the grape shot ricochetted from the walls and spared not a single nook or cranny. In this fashion the crowd reached the first crossroads, and here it was met with new fire from the Pavlovsky Grenadiers Regiment.

Not having seen where my brother had disappeared, I turned into some half-open gates on the right and met the master of the house himself; two fairly well-dressed men also rushed through the gates, and at the very moment when the first was inviting us to come inside, grape shot cut down one of the latter and he fell, blocking our path.

"I TOOK THE OTHER THREE CANNON AND POSITIONED THEM IN FRONT OF THE PREOBRAZHENSKY REGIMENT, AND ORDERED THEM TO BE LOADED WITH GRAPE SHOT..."

From the "Notes" of Nicholas I about 14 December 1825.[1]

At last came the 14 December—a fateful day! I rose early and, having dressed, received General Voinov, then we went into the present apartment of [Grand Prince.—*Comp.*] Alexander, where all the generals and regimental commanders of the Guards had assembled. Having explained to them how, by the mandatory will of Constantine, to whom, but a short while ago, I had taken the oath along with them, I found myself obliged to obey his desire and accept the throne, to which I am, following his abdication, the nearest in line of succession; after which I read the will of the late emperor and the act of abdication of Constantine. Thereafter, having received from

each the assurance of his loyalty and readiness to sacrifice himself, I ordered them to go to their command and administer the oath.

From the palace issued the instruction that all who had the right to enter should gather in the palace at 11 o'clock. At the same time the Synod and the Senate were gathering in their respective places for the oath.

Shortly after this Count Miloradovich came to see me with fresh assurances of total calm. After this I went to my mother, where I saw him again, and then returned to my own apartments. General Orlov, commander of the Horse Guards, arrived with the news that the regiment had taken the oath; having spoken with him for some time, I let him depart. Shortly after him Major-General Sukhozanet, commander of the Guards artillery, appeared with the news that the artillery had taken the oath, but that in the Horse Guards artillery there were officers who had revealed doubt in the rightness of the oath, wishing first to hear it confirmed by [Grand Prince.—*Comp.*] Mikhail, whom they thought removed from St Petersburg for supposed disagreement with my accession. Many of these officers had become so insubordinate that General Sukhozanet had had them arrested. But almost at the same time Mikhail finally arrived, and I requested him to leave immediately for the artillery in order to rectify the error and restore order.

A few minutes after this Major-General Neidgardt, chief-of-staff of the Guards Corps, arrived and, deeply perturbed, said: "Sire, le régiment de Moscou est en pleine insurrection; Chenchin et Frederichs sont grièvement blessés, et les mutins marchent sur le Sénat, j'ai à peine pu les dévancer pour vous le dire. Ordonnez, de grâce, au i-er bataillon Préobrajensky et à la garde-à-cheval de marcher contre."*

This news struck me like a bolt from the blue as, from the first moment, I did not see in this first act of insubordination the effect of doubt alone, which I had always feared, but, knowing of the existence of a conspiracy, recognised in this the first proof of it...

The arrivals at the palace had already begun, and the

* "Your Majesty! The whole of the Moscow Regiment has mutinied; Shenshin [brigade commander.—*Comp.*] and Frederiks [commander of the Moscow Regiment.—*Comp.*] are seriously wounded, and the mutineers are marching on the Senate; I was barely able to overtake them to bring you the news. Please give orders for the 1st Battalion of the Preobrazhensky Regiment and the Horse Guards to move out against them."

square was filled with people and criss-crossing carriages. Many looked into the courtyard out of curiosity, and on seeing me came in and bowed down in front of me. Having put a guard across the gates, I turned to the people who, on seeing me, began to run towards me shouting "Hurrah". I waved my hand to signal that I wished to speak. At that moment Count Miloradovich came up to me and saying: "Cela va mal, ils marchent au Sénat, mais je vais leur parler,"* left, and I never saw him again, except to pay him my last respects.

It was necessary to gain some time so that the troops could assemble, and to distract the attention of the people with something unusual—all this came to me as a kind of inspiration and I began to speak to the people, asking them whether they had read my Manifesto.[2] They all replied that they had not; I had the idea of reading it to them myself. Someone in the crowd had a copy; I took it from him and began to read quietly and slowly, explaining every word. But my heart sank, I confess, and only divine support enabled me to continue...

The crowd was still increasing on every side; I called out the riflemen to flank the battalion, and thus reached the corner of Voznesenskaya. Still not seeing the Horse Guards, I stopped and sent one old cavalry soldier who was with me, so that the regiment would move more quickly, to fetch them. Then I heard—"Hurrah, Constantine!"—quite clearly on the square facing the Senate, and I could see the line of riflemen preventing anyone from approaching.

At that moment Adjutant-General Orlov brought the Horse Guards, having come round the St Isaac Cathedral and emerged onto the square between it and the building of the War Ministry... I went up to him and, having greeted the people, said to them that if they had sincerely taken their oath to me, now was the time to prove it in deed. I ordered General Orlov to go with his regiment to Senate Square and position himself in such a way as to cut off access to the insurgents, as far as possible, on all sides, so that they would be surrounded where possible. The square [was.—*Comp.*] then, on the cathedral side, quite blocked by fences which stretched as far as the corner of the present Synod building; the corner formed by the boulevard and the bank of the Neva served as a

* "Things are going badly; they're advancing on the Senate, but I will go and speak to them."

site for storing the stones brought for the cathedral, and between this building material and the Peter the Great monument there was no more than about 50 paces. It was in this small space, marching in rows of six, that the regiment positioned itself in two lines, with its right flank facing the monument and the left reaching almost to the fences.

The insurgents were drawn up in a dense, irregular column with its back to the old Senate. Then there was still only the Moscow Regiment. At that very moment several shots were fired: they were shooting at General Voinov, but they only managed to injure him when he, having ridden up to them, wanted to dissuade them. Aide-de-camp Bibikov, the director of the office of Main Headquarters, was seized by them and brutally beaten before he managed to make his escape and come to me. From him we learned that Obolensky was the leader of the crowd.

Then I detailed a company of his Majesty's Preobrazhensky Regiment with Colonel Islenyev ... to cross the boulevard and take the Isaakiyevsky Bridge in order to cut off access from that side to Vasilyevsky Island and cover the flank of the Horse Guards. I myself, with Adjutant-General Benkendorf, who had just arrived, went out onto the square to examine the position of the insurgents. I was met with shots...

Then I learned that there had been disturbances and hesitation in the Izmailovsky Regiment when the oath was administered. However distressing it was for me to hear this, yet I resolutely refused to believe this to be just, and attributed it to those same plots, and therefore ordered Adjutant-General Levashov, who had presented himself, to go to the regiment and, should this prove possible, to move it, even if against me, but bring it out of the barracks. Meanwhile, seeing that the affair was growing in significance, and unable as yet to foresee how it would end, I sent Adlerberg to Prince Dolgoruky, Master of the Imperial Stables,[3] with instructions to prepare the travelling coaches for my mother and wife, and intended, in extremity, to take them out with the children to Tsarskoye Selo under the protection of the Horse Guards. I myself, having sent for the artillery, went onto Dvortsovaya Square in order to secure the palace, to which both sapper battalions, the Guards and the training battalion, had been ordered to report. Before I had reached the Main Headquarters building I saw the

Royal Grenadiers Regiment moving in total disorder, with their flags but without their officers. Having gone up to them, suspecting nothing, I wanted to stop them and line them up; to my "Halt!" they replied:

"We're for Constantine!"

I pointed towards Senate Square and said:

"If that's so, then that is the way you should go."

And the whole crowd of them passed by me, through the troops, and joined, without any hindrance, their similarly misled comrades. It was fortunate that it was so, for otherwise there would have been bloodshed beneath the windows of the palace, and our fate would have been more than doubtful. But such reasoning follows later; at the time divine providence alone gave me the idea.

The mercy of God revealed itself even more clearly at the moment when a throng of Royal Grenadiers led by officer Panov was advancing with the intention of seizing the palace and, should there be resistance, wiping out our entire family. They reached the main gates of the palace in a certain degree of order, so that the commandant thought they were the detachment I had sent to occupy the palace. However, Panov, who was at their head, suddenly noticed the sapper battalion of the Life-Guards Regiment, which had just arrived and formed a column in the courtyard, and, calling out "Those are not ours!", began to wheel the detachment round and ran out with them back onto the square. If the sapper battalion had arrived but a few minutes later, the palace and the whole of our family would have been in the hands of the insurgents, while I, preoccupied with what was happening on Senate Square and totally unaware of this extreme danger threatening in the rear, would have been totally unable to offer any resistance. This reveals with most amazing clarity that neither I nor anyone else could have brought the affair to a satisfactory conclusion if the mercy of God had not seen fit to direct everything for the best...

On returning to the troops, I found the artillery had arrived, but unfortunately without ammunition, which was stored in the laboratory. While this was being sent for, the insurrection intensified; to the original mass of the Moscow Regiment was added the whole of the Guards Naval Crew, which joined from Galernaya, while a crowd of Grenadiers took up position on the other side. The noise and shouts were incessant, and frequent shots flew past my head. Finally the people also began to

vacillate, and many ran across to the insurgents, in front of whom civilians could be seen. In a word, it became clear that it was no doubt concerning the oath that was the true reason for the rebellion, but the existence of another extremely serious conspiracy became apparent. "Hurrah, the Constitution!" could be heard and perceived by the mob as the hurrahs shouted in honour of the wife of Constantine...[4]

While I visited the Izmailovsky Regiment, metropolitan bishop Serafim came, as I had instructed, from the Winter Palace, wearing his robes and carrying a cross. The venerable pastor, accompanied by one junior deacon, came out of the carriage and, raising the cross to his forehead, went directly towards the throng; he wanted to speak, but Obolensky and others in the band prevented him, threatening to shoot if he did not depart...

The weather, previously rather wet, now became colder. There was very little snow, and therefore it was quite slippery. It was growing dark, for it was already the third hour of the afternoon. The noise and shouts became more insistent, and frequent rifle shots wounded many in the Horse Guards and passed over the heads of the troops. Most of the soldiers on the side of the insurgents were firing upwards.

Having emerged onto the square, I wished to see if there was any possibility of surrounding the crowd and obliging it to surrender without bloodshed. At that moment a gun was fired at me; bullets whistled over my head and, fortunately, none of us was wounded. Workers from the St Isaac Cathedral construction site began to throw pieces of wood at us from behind the fence. It was necessary to bring the situation to a rapid conclusion, otherwise the rebellion might communicate itself to the mob, and then the troops, surrounded by them, would be in a most difficult position.

I agreed to attempt a cavalry attack. First the Horse Guards attacked in squadrons, but could achieve nothing both because of lack of space and the ice-covered pavement, but in particular because they were without their broadswords. The enemy, forming a dense column, had all the advantage on its side, and seriously wounded many, including captain Velio, who lost his arm. The Cavalierguards Regiment likewise moved into the attack, but without much success.

Then Adjutant-General Vasilchikov turned to me and said: "Sire, il n'y a pas un moment à perdre; l'on n'y

peut rien maintenant; il faut de la mitraille."*

I had anticipated this necessity, but confess that, when the moment came, I could not make up my mind to resort to such a measure and horror seized me.

"Vous voulez que je verse le sang de mes sujets le premier jour de mon règne?** I replied to Vasilchikov.

"Pour sauver votre Empire,"*** he said to me.

These words brought back my presence of mind; I came to my senses and saw that either I had to take it upon myself to shed the blood of a few and save, almost certainly, all, or, sparing myself, with certainty sacrifice the state.

Having sent one cannon of the 1st Light Infantry Battery to [Prince.—*Comp.*] Mikhail in order to reinforce that side as the sole possibility of retreat for the insurgents, I took the other three cannon and positioned them in front of the Preobrazhensky Regiment, and ordered them to be loaded with grape shot...

My whole hope was that the insurgents would take fright at these preparations and surrender, not seeing any other salvation. But they remained firm; the shouts continued more insistently. Finally I sent Major-General Sukhozanet to tell them that if they did not now lay down their arms, I would give the order to fire. "Hurrah" and the former exclamations were the reply, followed by a shot.

Then, seeing no other means, I ordered: "Fire!" The first shot struck the Senate building high up, and the insurgents replied with furious shouts and running fire. The second and third shots from ourselves and the other side, from the cannon of the Semyonovsky Regiment, struck into the very middle of the throng and it scattered instantaneously, fleeing along the Angliiskaya Embankment towards the Neva, along Galernaya, and even towards the cannon shots coming from the Semyonovsky Regiment, in order to reach the Kryukov Canal.

Having given the order to advance, we moved the Preobrazhensky and Izmailovsky regiments across the square, while a squadron of Guards Mounted Pioneers and a section of the Horse Guards pursued those fleeing along the Angliiskaya Embankment. One group was about to line

* "Sire, there is not a moment to lose; there is nothing to be done, we will have to use grape shot."

** "Do you want me to spill the blood of my subjects on the first day of my reign?"

*** "To save your Empire."

up on the Neva, but two shots of grape shot dispersed them—and it only remained to track down those hiding or dispersing, which task was entrusted to Adjutant-General Benkendorf...

"THE TIME HAD COME FOR EXPIATORY SACRIFICE."

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. "The Insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment". From His Reminiscences[1]

I will relate what I saw and what I know about the uprising of the Chernigovsky Regiment in 1825.

At the end of December, Pavel Pestel informed his brother of the death of the emperor and the two reports made during his lifetime.

In December 1825, Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin learned about the death of his mother, whom he loved dearly. Feeling with him in his grief, my brother wanted to try to obtain leave for him. Bestuzhev, a former officer with the old Semyonovsky Regiment, had been transferred, as had all his fellow-officers, to the army following the "Semyonovsky affair". It was well known that, on the instructions of the supreme government, it was forbidden to recommend them for promotion, and they were deprived of the right to request leave or retirement. The second battalion of the Chernigovsky Regiment, which was under the command of Sergei [the brother of Matvei Muravyov-Apostol.—*Comp.*], and from which he eliminated corporal punishment, was considered exemplary in the whole of the 3rd Infantry Corps. General Rot, the corps commander, was so favourably disposed to my brother that he had twice recommended him as a regimental commander.

On 22 December, my brother left for corps headquarters with the purpose of obtaining leave for Bestuzhev. At the last staging post, just before Zhitomir,* we received (I was accompanying my brother) our first news about the events of 14 December from a Senate courier, who was delivering the oath papers [i.e. the text of the oath.—*Comp.*]

On arriving in Zhitomir, my brother hastened to pres-

* Zhitomir—a town in the Ukraine.

ent himself to the corps commander, who confirmed what we had heard from the courier. There was no further point in requesting leave for Bestuzhev. Rot invited my brother to dine with him. At dinner they talked of nothing else except the events in St Petersburg; they spoke of the death of Count Mikhail Miloradovich. When my brother returned to headquarters, the carriage was ready, and we went back to Vasilkov by way of Berdichev...*

[On the way.—*Comp.*] we called on Alexander Muravyov, and then ... on his brother, Artamon. That night we changed horses in Berdichev and continued on our way.

Before reaching Vasilkov, we stopped at Trilesy, where the fifth musketeer company, part of my brother's battalion, was stationed. It had not yet returned from Vasilkov, where it had gone because of the second oath. In Trilesy we stayed at the quarters of A. Kuzmin,[2] the commander of the fifth company.

Bestuzhev rode into Trilesy with the news that gendarmes from St Petersburg had arrived during my brother's absence, and that, having failed to find him in Vasilkov, they had taken all his papers and left for Zhitomir. We learned from Bestuzhev that the St. Petersburg gendarmes were waiting for my brother in order to arrest him, and that on the very night when we had changed horses, Berdichev had been surrounded by troops, and a sentry posted at every exit.

On the night of 28 December, the commander of the Chernigovsky Regiment, Gebel, together with the gendarme captain ... having pursued my brother as far as Zhitomir, caught up with him in Trilesy. After several sleepless nights spent on the road, my brother had undressed and gone to bed. Gebel requested us to dress in order to hear His Imperial Majesty's command. This consisted in our arrest and transfer to St Petersburg.

We invited Gebel to partake of some tea, to which he eagerly agreed. While we were drinking our tea, day dawned. Kuzmin and his company returned from Vasilkov. All the company commanders of the second battalion of the Chernigovsky Regiment also arrived in order to call on their battalion commander. Gebel busied himself setting up sentries around the peasant cabin we were in, and posted two men at each window. Coming back

* Vasilkov—the place where Headquarters of the Chernigovsky Regiment were stationed. Berdichev—a small town south of Zhitomir.

into the room and addressing the officers in a threatening tone, he asked of them what they were doing there. Kuzmin told him that they were at their own headquarters. "How did you dare speak with the arrested man?" This clumsy move by Gebel brought an explosion of indignation from the officers. Kuzmin went up to him, waving his finger menacingly, and reminded him how often Sergei [Muravyov.—*Comp.*] had helped him out of trouble. Gebel, unable to bear the reproaches, left the room; the officers followed him. Soon loud exclamations and shouts could be heard. The frightened gendarme, a tall man, fell on his knees in front of my brother, begging him (in French) to spare his life. My brother calmed him, assuring him that his life was not in the slightest danger. The gendarme left the cabin and immediately departed from Trilesy.

Although I was not a witness to the beating, I can certainly affirm that the wounds allegedly inflicted on Gebel in his chest and side are a pure lie. I cannot state whether or not he was struck with a rifle butt. With the kind of injuries mentioned in the reports, Gebel would not have been able to return immediately to Vasilkov.

For his zeal and efficiency, Gebel was appointed second Kiev commandant. Despite this, one can say without fear of error that if, in place of Gebel, the Chernigovsky Regiment had had as regimental commander a man who had earned the respect of his subordinates and shown more intelligence, then neither the disturbances nor the uprising would have occurred.

The fifth company, hearing that its battalion commander had been released from arrest, greeted him with loud shouts of "Hurrah!". My brother ordered the soldiers to go to their billets, pack up their kit and prepare to march.

The unexpected events following so quickly the one upon the other: his arrest and then his immediate release as a result of the indignation of the officers, placed my brother in a desperate position.

Having taken part in the campaigns of 1812, 1813 and 1814, Sergei was sufficiently knowledgeable about military affairs not to nourish any hopes of success with a force consisting of a handful of men. But circumstances were such that the uprising, unplanned, unprepared, was an already accomplished fact as a result of the crude and foolhardy behaviour of Gebel towards the officers, whose respect he was unable to win. The soldiers hated him,

sympathised with their officers, had complete trust in them, and particularly in Sergei. They told him they were prepared to follow him wherever he took them. The officers, having violated the law of military obedience, waited upon his decision. To leave them would have meant a refusal to share the unhappy fate that awaited them. My brother decided to march out and join up with the 8th Infantry Division, stationed outside Zhitomir. Many members of the Secret Society and the Society of Associated Slavs were serving with the 8th Infantry Division. The first included several regimental commanders on whose collaboration we could rely: several companies of the old Semyonovsky Regiment had been transferred to this division and had complete confidence in my brother. The officers of the 8th Foot Artillery Brigade gave Sergei to understand, when they learned of the death of the sovereign, that everything was ready for them to march out, and the horses shod with winter shoes. In addition the hope that the uprising in the south, by distracting the attention of the government from our comrades in the north, would lighten the retribution threatening to descend upon them, seemed to justify in his eyes the desperateness of his enterprise; finally, there was also the thought that, as a result of the reports by Maiboroda and Sherwood, there would be no mercy, that the dungeons were the same silent graves; all this, taken together, inspired in my brother the conviction that it was impossible to reject this apparently reckless undertaking, and that the time had come for expiatory sacrifice. The company marched out of Trilesy. We camped for the night in the village of Spidinki. On 30 December, around the third hour of the afternoon, the companies reached Vasilkov. We were confronted by riflemen sent out against us. When the company had drawn close enough to make out the faces of the soldiers, the riflemen shouted "Hurrah!", joined up with their fifth company and marched into Vasilkov with it. On entering the town, my brother took the following measures: he released Mikhail Shchepillo, Baron Veniamin Solovyov and Ivan Sukhinov,[3] who had returned the previous day from Trilesy and were under arrest; he reinforced the guard on the prison and the treasury; he set up a guard on the house occupied by Gebel; orders were issued to all those on duty at the town gates that no one was to be allowed to enter or leave the town without my brother's knowledge and permission. The night passed peacefully. A few offi-

cers, departing on leave or returning to their regiments, came to see Sergei and continued on their way without any hindrance. A gendarme who passed through the town was detained during the night. Early in the morning of 31 December, the full complement of the second battalion of the Chernigovsky Regiment gathered in Vasilkov; two companies of the first battalion also joined us. After much hesitation, the regimental chaplain[4] of the Chernigovsky Regiment agreed to take the service and read out the Catechism drawn up by my brother. It set out the duties of the soldier to God and his country.

After prayers the companies prepared to march out of Vasilkov; at this point a mail-service troika drove up, and my brother Hyppolite[5] hurled himself into our arms. Hyppolite had only just passed his examinations with honours, had been made a staff officer and appointed to the Second Army. In vain we begged him to carry on his way to Tulchin, where he had been posted; he remained with us.

On 31 December we arrived in Motovilovka, where we rested for the day because of the New Year.

On 2 January 1826, Sergei Muravyov intended to leave for Berdichev in order to take advantage of the forested terrain. On learning that the 18th Regiment of the Chasseurs, stationed at Belaya Tserkov, had been sent out against us, he turned off for Zhitomir, taking the shortest route through Trilesy.

On 3 January 1826, during a halt, we learned that a cavalry detachment with a mounted artillery company was blocking the road to Trilesy. Universal rejoicing: the mounted artillery company was under the command of Colonel Pykhachev—a member of the Secret Society. It was only in 1860, when I was living in Tver, that I learned that Pykhachev had been arrested the day before his company was sent out against us. We made ready to march out, drew up in columns by company and continued on our way. The terrain proved the least suitable for infantrymen who had to confront cavalry. The detachment and the cannon came into sight. We advanced. A cannon shot was fired, followed by a second, and a cannon-ball flew over our heads. We continued to advance. Grape shot began, and several of our men fell: some killed, others wounded, the first including the commander of the sixth musketeer company, Staff-Captain Mikhail Shchepillo. Then Sergei decided to end the unequal battle and save his command from certain death,

and he ordered them to stack up their rifles. The soldiers obeyed, not understanding why their commander should have halted their advance. Sergei told them that he had done them wrong, that he had deceived them in encouraging them to hope for success. He began to wave a white flag to the artillery, and immediately fell to the ground, cut down by grape shot. Hyppolite, believing his brother to be dead, shot himself with his own pistol.

We were put into sledges; we had to ride past soldiers who gazed sorrowfully at my brother. Not one of them showed the slightest sign of reproach on his face. When we had left, the cavalry surrounded the Chernigovsky Regiment.

In Trilesy we were lodged in the tavern under guard... My brother's wound was not bandaged, and there was nothing to bind it with. Our things, our linen and the rest, had been taken by the Hussars.

Night fell, light was brought in. Kuzmin, who was lying on some straw opposite me, asked me to go up to him. I pointed to the wounded head of my brother lying on my shoulder. Kuzmin crawled with visible effort towards me, gave the hand clasp by which the Associated Slavs recognised each other, crawled back to his straw, lay down, and immediately shot himself with his pistol, which he had had concealed in his coat sleeve. Kuzmin had hidden from us the fact that he had received two grape-shot wounds: one in the side, the other in his left arm. I would like to say a few words about him.

Anastasii Kuzmin had been educated in the 1st Cadet Corps. In 1823 I happened to call on my brother Sergei in Vasilkov. I found him occupied with his duties from morning onwards with the recruits who had arrived in his battalion and whom he trained personally. My brother asked me to go for a ride on his horse in order to break her in. On Vasilkov square, which lies on the road from Kiev to Berdichev and is always bustling with Polish light carriages, I came across the training command of the Chernigovsky Infantry Regiment. The instructors, junior officers, were holding rods which had splayed at the ends from constant beatings. I was then still in service, and I ordered the officer in charge of the training command to be sent to me. Kuzmin came. Reminding him of the article in the regulations on recruits which forbids corporal punishment during training, I added: "Shame on you, Sir, for providing the Polish gentlemen with such an entertaining spectacle..." Then I ordered the rods to

be thrown away, and left. On returning to my brother, I told him about my meeting with Kuzmin, from whom I was expecting a challenge to a duel. My brother offered to be my second; the demand for satisfaction did not come. Having spent a further three weeks with my brother, I left for my father's estate, and from there for St Petersburg. In 1824 I again visited my brother, and found him with Kuzmin, who threw himself into my arms, thanking me for having brought him to reason by setting before him the baseness of corporal punishment. My brother told me that Kuzmin had completely altered, that he had joined the soldiers' artel of his company, and that he lived in the company as if with his own family.

The shot fired by Kuzmin caused my brother to lose consciousness, as he had done several times already due to the loss of blood from his unbandaged wound.

In the morning of 4 January, the wound was bound and sledges sent for; a convoy was prepared ... in order to take us to Belaya Tserkov. At first the commander of the convoy insistently refused our request to be allowed to say farewell to our brother Hyppolite, but then he led us into an unoccupied, rather spacious cabin. On the floor lay the naked bodies of the dead soldiers, including our brother Hyppolite. His face had not been disfigured by the gunshot; a small swelling could be seen on his left cheek, under his eye, and the expression on his face was one of proud calm. I helped my wounded brother Sergei down onto his knees; we looked at our Hyppolite, prayed, and kissed our dead brother for the last time.

I was put in the same sledge as my injured brother. On the way we consoled ourselves with the thought that in Siberia, or wherever we were sent, we would always remain together. A young ... Hussar officer who was sitting at the front of our sledge expressed, without any attempt on our part to draw him into conversation, the sympathy he and his fellows felt for us.

In Belaya Tserkov we were lodged in different cabins, and this deprived me of my last, so to speak, comfort—that of looking after my wounded brother. With that I will end my account of the uprising of the Chernigovsky Infantry Regiment in 1825.

Ivan Gorbachevsky. "The Insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment". From His "Notes"[1]

Two days before Christmas, we in the Chernigovsky Regiment learned about the events of 14 December (1825). The following day (24 December), in the morning, Sergei Muravyov [-Apostol.—*Comp.*] told the Slavs that he was going to Zhitomir and would soon return. He said that the purpose of his trip was to try to obtain from the corps commander permission for Bestuzhev-Riumin to go on leave to St Petersburg... The evening of that same day, shortly after Sergei Muravyov had left, the company commanders of the Chernigovsky Regiment were instructed by their regimental commander [Gebel.—*Comp.*] to bring their companies to regimental headquarters to take the oath to the new emperor, Nicholas I. On hearing this order, the Slavs immediately agreed to gather their companies in full marching order and battle dress, intending to use this opportunity and, without waiting for Muravyov to return from Zhitomir, to bring out the regiment and march directly to Kiev, where Muravyov, on hearing of their move, could join them. This idea came to them on hearing of the unsuccessful events of 14 December in St Petersburg. Knowing about the unhappy consequences, they wanted to bring about another insurrection in the south, and thus save the Secret Society from final destruction.

Early on the morning of 25 December, when all the companies of the Chernigovsky Regiment had gathered in Vasilkov, the members of the Slav Society hesitated in their plans; they did not know what decision to take: to begin, or to wait for Sergei Muravyov to return...

That same day, at 10 o'clock in the morning, the oath was taken. The soldiers pronounced their pledge with the greatest reluctance; some of them stood with a gloomy, fixed gaze, in deep silence, and not only did not repeat the words of the priest, but did not even listen to them, while the officers displayed obvious impatience and discontent, paid no attention whatsoever to the ceremony, and many of them did not even raise their hands as is usually done on such occasions. A subdued murmuring in the ranks accompanied every word said by the priest...

Displeasure and reluctance expressed themselves in

every movement, and revealed a rebellious spirit; it was as if everyone was waiting for something unusual to happen, and wished to be a witness to it. Gebel saw all of this, but sought to conceal his annoyance from his subordinates, and pronounced the oath with particular reverence and zeal, as if wishing by this to arouse in the hearts of others their lapsed loyalty to the royal house...

Now let us return to Sergei Muravyov, whom we left in Zhitomir. Having arrived in the early hours of 25 December, he went to the corps commander, who invited him to dine with him. During dinner, General Rot told him in detail about the events of 14 December, having received this information by special mail. From this conversation, Sergei Muravyov saw clearly that the Society had been discovered by the government, and that measures to arrest its members had already been taken. After dinner he lost no time in departing for Trayanov, where the Alexandriisky Hussars Regiment was quartered... Having spent no more than an hour in Trayanov, Sergei Muravyov had nonetheless spoken with those officers of the regiment who belonged to the Society, and had undoubtedly informed them about what had happened in the capital; then he went with his brother Matvei to Liubar to see Artamon Muravyov[2] [also a member of the Secret Society.—*Comp.*], who was the commander of the Akhtyrsky Regiment... He tried to know about the readiness of the lower ranks (for the insurrection.—*Comp.*). Then the conversation turned to other subjects, when Bestuzhev-Riumin suddenly came into the room.

"There's an order for your arrest," he said, panting, to Sergei Muravyov. "All your papers have been seized by Gebel, who is coming after you with gendarmes."

These words were like a thunderbolt for both brothers and Artamon Muravyov.

"It's all over!" exclaimed Matvei Muravyov. "We are doomed, a dreadful fate awaits us; would it not be better for us to die? Order supper and champagne," he continued, turning to Artamon Muravyov. "Let's have a drink and shoot ourselves cheerfully."

"Wouldn't that be a little premature?" said Sergei Muravyov rather reproachfully.

"We will die just in time," countered Matvei. "Think, brother—we four are the main members [of the Secret Society.—*Comp.*], and by our death we can conceal the less well-known from government investigation."

"That is in part true," replied Sergei Muravyov, "but

we are not the only leading members of the Society. My decision is different. Artamon ... may be able to change the course of events... [Here Gorbachevsky describes Sergei Muravyov's vain attempts to persuade Artamon Muravyov to bring out his Akhtyrsky Regiment. Artamon Muravyov refused on various pretexts.—*Comp.*]

...Bitterly disappointed by this wholly unexpected behaviour on the part of the commander of the Akhtyrsky Regiment, Sergei Muravyov, together with his brother Matvei and Bestuzhev-Riumin, hastily left Liubar, and had to travel on already exhausted horses... Finally, in the late afternoon of 29 December, having travelled along various country roads, they reached the village of Trilesy, 45 versts from Vasilkov, and stayed at the quarters of Lieutenant Kuzmin, who was billeted in this village with his company...

The officers of the Chernigovsky Regiment whom we had left in Vasilkov were impatiently waiting for a sign for the insurrection. Although they had no doubt that the other members of the Secret Society were ready to support them in achieving their common aim, nonetheless lack of information weighed more heavily on them by the hour; they could not act, but felt unable to do nothing. To begin to take action, they needed to know the whereabouts of Sergei Muravyov and his decision. Finally this wish was granted. At about 11 o'clock in the evening of 28 December 1825, Kuzmin received from a private in his company a note which read as follows: "I have arrived in Trilesy and am staying at your quarters. Join me, and also tell Baron Solovyov, Shchepillo and Sukhinov to come as quickly as they can to Trilesy. Yours, Sergei Muravyov."

Kuzmin lost no time in telling his colleagues of Muravyov's desire to see them.

"Then we'll go!" they cried with one voice. "We'll go this very night."

A few minutes later the horses were ready. However, the thought that Sergei Muravyov had perhaps already been arrested by Gebel on his arrival in Trilesy cooled their ardour and made them ponder.

"What shall we do if Gebel has arrested Muravyov?" asked one of them.

"Free him, and move into action. Free him!" was the unanimous answer.

Having resolved upon such a daring venture, and not knowing which road Gebel would take with the arrested

Muravyov from Trilesy to Vasilkov, the Chernigovsky officers decided to separate and take two roads in order to make sure of meeting him. Solovyov and Shchepillo took the main road, while Kuzmin and Sukhinov took the country road.

While they were hastening towards Trilesy, their fears were realised. At midnight on that same day, Gebel had arrived there with a gendarme officer and, learning that Sergei Muravyov and his brother Matvei were staying at the quarters of Kuzmin, he had gathered a section of the company billeted there, surrounded the house, quietly entered the room in which both Muravyovs were peacefully sleeping, taken the pistols lying on the table, and then, having woken them up, read to them the order for their arrest.

At 8 o'clock on the morning of 29 December, Kuzmin and Sukhinov rode into Trilesy. On seeing his house surrounded by sentries, Kuzmin said to his colleague:

"Our supposition has proved true: Myravyov has been arrested! It is fortunate that we have found him here."

[A short while later Solovyov and Shchepillo arrived in Trilesy. The four of them released the Muravyov-Apostol brothers, wounding Colonel Gebel as they did so, but he was still able to escape.—*Comp.*]

... Sergei Muravyov ordered Kuzmin to gather his company and march to the village of Kovalyovka, and he himself, taking Solovyov and Shchepillo, went on ahead to the same village... Shchepillo and Solovyov, having left Sergei Muravyov in the village of Kovalyovka, where the 2nd Grenadier Company [of the Chernigovsky Regiment.—*Comp.*] was quartered, went to join their own companies...

In Kovalyovka, Sergei Muravyov sent straight away for the sergeant-major and junior officers of the 2nd Grenadiers Regiment in order to find out what they thought about the planned insurrection. Seeing that they were ready to share all the dangers of the undertaking with him, he ordered the sergeant-major to assemble the company. The grenadiers assembled opposite the quarters of their company commander, with whom Sergei emerged and, after the usual greeting, briefly put the matter to them. He then asked them if they felt they had enough courage to venture upon such a daring and great exploit. The grenadiers unanimously declared their support and answered that they were. Sergei Muravyov then dismissed them and told them to prepare to march out...

Bestuzhev-Riumin arrived in Kovalyovka and there learned about what had happened while he had been away. Nothing is known for certain about where he was, but probably, as far as one can surmise by the circumstances, he had gone to see nearby regiments and invite their commanders to join in the enterprise...

The following day (30 December), early in the morning, Sergei Muravyov, with the 1st Grenadiers Company and a large section of the 5th Musketeer Company, marched out of Kovalyovka, intending to cover 35 versts in one march and arrive at Vasilkov. Learning of this movement, Major Trukhin ordered that the alarm be sounded in the town, and commanded the 4th Musketeer Company, which was on guard duty, to prepare for battle. These preparations filled the residents with horror: they thought that in a few minutes Vasilkov would be the scene of a bloody battle, but just the opposite proved to be the case.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the vanguard of Sergei Muravyov's troops, under the command of Sukhinov, peacefully entered the town, reached the town square without meeting any resistance, and did not undertake any hostile moves against the residents. The peaceable appearance of the insurgents cheered Major Trukhin. Hoping to disarm them with words, he approached the vanguard with just a few soldiers and a drummer, and began, while still some way off, to try to persuade them into submission by threats and promises, but when he drew closer, he was seized by Bestuzhev and Sukhinov who, mocking his oratory, pushed him into the middle of the column. In a moment the peaceability of the soldiers vanished: they hurled themselves furiously on this hated major, tore off his epaulettes, ripped his uniform to shreds, poured abuse on him, ridicule and, finally, blows. At that moment Sergei Muravyov, who had arrived at the square with his column, rescued Trukhin from further unpleasantness, ordering the soldiers not to touch him, but to take him to the guard-room under arrest. At almost the same time the 4th Musketeer Company, which was on guard duty, and the 6th, which was coming to relieve it, joined Sergei Muravyov with cheers of enthusiasm.

Such a happy beginning revived new hope in the hearts of the Chernigovsky officers. They did not doubt the further success of their arms, and were already dreaming of the end of their difficult exploit... The officers of the

Chernigovsky Regiment wasted no time. The night of 30 December was spent in preparations to march. Each was busy with his affairs, forgetful of danger; the energy and zeal of the members of the Society were unprecedented; they sought to inspire the soldiers with fresh courage and maintain their morale. In order to do so more effectively, they did all they could to secure provisions. The soldiers themselves showed no less fervour in their preparations to march: rifles, ammunition and all the accoutrements were carefully inspected and any deficiencies corrected...

In the order he issued that evening, Sergei Muravyov instructed all the companies there present to assemble on the square the following day (31 December) at 9 o'clock. At the appointed time, five companies came to the assembly point in full campaign readiness. The musicians appeared by their own decision, without any orders, and 60 men, leaving their instruments behind and taking weapons from the regimental stores, joined the ranks of their comrades...

The companies, having assembled, were formed into a compact column. Sergei Muravyov came up and gave the soldiers a friendly greeting, and then briefly outlined the aim of the insurrection and argued how noble and exalted it was to sacrifice one's life for freedom. There was universal enthusiasm; the officers and men declared their readiness to go wherever their beloved and respected commander led them. Then Sergei Muravyov turned to the [regimental.—*Comp.*] chaplain and asked him to read out the "Political Catechism", which was composed of purely republican regulations rendered comprehensible to all. In a loud, clear voice the chaplain read out the rules and obligations of free citizens.

"Our cause," said Muravyov, once more addressing the soldiers when the chaplain had finished, "is so great and noble that it should not be stained by any compulsion, and therefore if any of you—officers or men—feel unable to join in such an undertaking, let him leave the ranks immediately. He may remain in the town without fear, if only his conscience allows him to remain calm and does not reproach him with having abandoned his comrades in such a difficult and glorious task, and at a time when our country requires the help of each of her sons."

Loud cries greeted the last words spoken by Sergei Muravyov. No one left the ranks, and everyone waited impatiently for the minutes to fly towards glory or death.

Meanwhile the chaplain was coming to the end of the prayers. The effect of this dramatic scene was intensified by the arrival of a court officer [an officer belonging to the royal retinue.—*Comp.*] who enthusiastically threw himself into the arms of Sergei Muravyov. It was his younger brother, Hyppolite. The hope of receiving from him encouraging news about the readiness of other members [of the Secret Society.—*Comp.*] shone on every face. Each believed that this arrival was indisputable evidence of a general insurrection, and all rejoiced in advance over the happy conclusion of the exploit they were about to undertake.

Amidst these hopes, the column, having received the blessing of the chaplain, moved off along the road to the village of Motovilovka with a shout of "Hurrah!" The town residents, crowding around them, accompanied the soldiers and wished them success.

"May God go with you!" could be heard on every side.

The soldiers were cheerful, courage gleamed in their eyes, happy songs expressed their calm spirit...

On the way to Motovilovka, Hyppolite Muravyov told the officers of the Chernigovsky Regiment that he had left St Petersburg on 13 December with instructions from the Secret Society to inform the members of the Southern Society about the plan to begin an insurrection in the capital city and to request them to support it. He also said that the Moscow members shared the views of the St Petersburg members, and had promised to help ensure the success of the insurrection, wherever it began. And, finally, he added that, while en route, he had learned of the tragic events of 14 December.

"My arrival here at the solemn moment of prayer," he said, "made me forget all that had happened. Perhaps your enterprise will prove successful, but if I am deceived in my hopes, I shall not survive a second failure, and I swear by my honour that I will perish on that fatal spot."

These words affected everyone.

"I swear I will not be taken alive!" exclaimed Lieutenant Kuzmin fervently. "I have long since said 'Freedom or Death!'"

Hyppolite Muravyov embraced him: they exchanged pistols, and both kept their vow...

On 31 December 1825, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the companies of the Chernigovsky Regiment under the command of Sergei Muravyov entered Motovilovka, where the 1st Grenadiers Company and part of the 1st

Musketeer Company had already assembled, expecting their arrival. As soon as Muravyov saw the soldiers of these companies, he went up to them and began to speak about the aim of the insurrection and what he planned to do next.

...Before dismissing the regiment, Sergei Muravyov gave orders that 1 January was to be a day's rest, and told the company commanders to see to provisions for the lower ranks, and also to ensure a supply of warm clothing and try, above all, to keep up the morale of the men. On his instructions, the companies were billeted in cramped quarters; sentries were posted at every entry into and exit from the village, all were ordered to be ready to repulse attack at any moment, and men were put on duty in the regiment and the companies. On the day of rest, Sergei Muravyov inspected all the sentries, visited every company, talked with the men, encouraged them, and, first and foremost, concerned himself with their needs. As he toured the sentries, he was surrounded by people returning from church. The good peasants eagerly wished him a happy New Year and every happiness, and constantly repeated:

"May God go with you, our kind Colonel, our deliverer."

Sergei Muravyov was moved to tears, thanked the peasants, told them that he would gladly die to secure for them the smallest relief, that the officers and men were ready to die for them, and did not expect from them any reward except their affection, which they would seek to merit. It seemed that the peasants, despite their lack of education, understood what benefits they might secure from Muravyov's success; they gladly welcomed his soldiers, looked after them, and provided more than enough for them, seeing them not as billeted soldiers, but as defenders. Thereafter he said more than once that on that New Year he experienced such happy moments that only death could chase them from his memory...

That evening the order was given to march out, and the next day, at 8 o'clock in the morning, the companies were already at the assembly point... At 9 o'clock, the regiment marched out of Motovilovka along the road that leads to the village of Pologi, which lies 12 versts from Belaya Tserkov. By this move Muravyov hoped to join up with the 17th Regiment of the Chasseurs, then stationed in that place. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon (2 January), Sergei Muravyov occupied the village of Pologi. Not re-

ceiving any news about the 17th Regiment of the Chasseurs, on which he placed great hopes, Sergei Muravyov charged Sukhinov with finding out where the regiment was, and what could be expected from the members [of the Secret Society.—*Comp.*] serving with it. As evening fell, Sukhinov took a few trustworthy soldiers and, forming them into a mounted detachment, set off for Belaya Tserkov. One and a half versts from this place, he met the Cossacks of Countess Branitskaya [the owner of an estate in Belaya Tserkov.—*Comp.*], sent to inspect and protect her estate against the so-called rebels. Sukhinov made use of the encounter. Having come fairly close to the Cossack detachment, he bared his sabre and rushed on them shouting "Forward!". Terrified by this unexpected and bold attack, the Cossacks dispersed. One of them, caught by Sukhinov himself, tried to resist, but Sukhinov brought him down from his horse with one blow from his sabre, and began to question him. Although the Cossack, apparently quite truthfully, declared that the 17th Regiment of the Chasseurs had left Belaya Tserkov two days previously, Sukhinov, wishing to verify this statement, himself rode up to the place and tried to find out from the residents all he could about the departure of the regiment. The replies he received from the residents confirmed what the Cossack had said. The regimental commander, having arrested Lieutenant Alexander Vadkovsky,[3] had indeed marched out of Belaya Tserkov that same night in the opposite direction from Vasilkov, not telling anyone where he was going...

The news of the departure of the 17th Regiment of the Chasseurs compelled Sergei Muravyov to change his plan of action. The following day, that is, 3 January, he left Pologi with the intention of passing through Kovalyovka and Trilesy ... in order to join up with the Slavs...

At midday, Muravyov marched out of Kovalyovka towards Trilesy... His entire force consisted of 970 men of the lower ranks, and five officers, namely: Baron Solovyov, Shchepillo, Kuzmin, Sukhinov and Bystritsky. Apart from these officers there were also Bestuzhev-Riumin and Matvei and Hyppolite Muravyov-Apostol.

Having left behind him on either side the village roads leading from Kovalyovka to Trilesy, Sergei Muravyov and his detachment took the shorter route directly across the steppe. The column had only just departed and had traversed no more than one quarter of a verst when a cannon shot struck the ears of the amazed soldiers, who

could see some distance away cannon screened by Hussars.* This shot was followed by several more, but not one of them inflicted the slightest injury on the column—perhaps they were firing blank shots. The regiment advanced. Muravyov gave the order for rifles to be inspected and to prepare for battle; this command put new spirit into the soldiers, but the surge of animated courage was halted by real cannon fire.

The first grape shot wounded and killed several soldiers. Sergei Muravyov wanted to call in the riflemen; a second shot wounded him in the head; Lieutenant Shchepillo and a few of the men fell to the ground, dead. Sergei Muravyov stood as if rooted to the spot; blood ran down his face; he summoned all his strength and wanted to issue the necessary commands, but the soldiers, seeing him covered in blood, hesitated; the men of the first troop threw down their weapons and scattered over the steppe; the men of the second followed their example; others, retaining their presence of mind, appeared to be ready to yield their lives dearly. A few well-placed cannon shots changed these intentions, the grape shot was lethal: a large number of soldiers died in the ranks of their comrades, Kuzmin and Hyppolite Muravyov were wounded, Bystritsky received a blow which rendered him almost incapable of standing on his feet. The courage of the soldiers wavered; Sukhinov, Kuzmin and Solovyov made every effort to arouse in them their former hopes and good spirits. The latter, wanting to offer an example and inspire with his own daring, displayed a clear disdain for his life, stood right in the line of fire and called on them to advance, but all was in vain. The sight of the dead and wounded, and the absence of Sergei Muravyov delivered a decisive blow to the courage of the insurgent Chernigovsky soldiers; throwing down their weapons, they ran off in every direction. One squadron of Hussars pursued them as they scattered across the steppe, while another surrounded the officers, who were still on the spot previously occupied by the column, between the wounded and the dead. At that moment Solovyov, seeing Sergei Muravyov close by and walking slowly towards the string of sledges, ran up to him in order to help him. Sergei Muravyov was a little delirious; he did not recognise Solovyov, and to all his questions answered:

* This was a mounted detachment of Hussars with artillery sent to put down the insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment and under the command of General Geismar.

"Where is my brother, where is he?"

Taking his hand, Solovyov wanted to lead him to the officers still standing in their former position. But scarcely had he made this move when Bestuzhev-Riumin came up to him, threw his arms round Sergei Muravyov's neck, and began to soothe him with kisses and words of consolation...

When the hope of success had vanished, Hyppolite Muravyov, wounded and bleeding, had walked a few steps away from the fatal spot, and at almost the same moment as the Hussar rode on him, shot himself through the head and fell down dead. On the orders of General Geismar, the Hussars surrounded the officers and wounded soldiers and removed their weapons.

Thus ended the insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment. Around 60 men [soldiers and officers.—*Comp.*] and 12 peasants with sledges were killed or seriously wounded. Lieutenant Shchepillo died in the ranks; Sergei Muravyov was wounded in the head; Hyppolite Muravyov in the left arm; Kuzmin was shot through the shoulder; all three by grape shot. Bystritsky had received a severe contusion in the right leg; Bestuzhev's coat had bullet holes in several places. This is evidence of the lethal fire faced by the Chernigovsky Regiment, and of how little the officers thought of saving their own lives...

At 5 o'clock in the evening of 3 January, the officers and men were taken in strongly-guarded convoy to the village of Trilesy. Sergei Muravyov, his brother Matvei, Solovyov, Kuzmin, Bystritsky and Bestuzhev-Riumin* were lodged together in the tavern in one large room, with the guards on the other side of a partition. Inside and around the tavern sentries were posted. The lower ranks were quartered in peasant cabins under strict surveillance. Shortly after arriving in Trilesy, Kuzmin died a truly heroic death...

* Sukhinov succeeded in escaping.

"IN OUR DESTINY WE TAKE PRIDE..."

"Emperor Nicholas revealed in our case such bitterness against us, such an inhuman understanding of autocratic power, and at the same time such a fear of liberal ideas, of everything that had any hint of opposition to the government, that it was possible to guess in advance all his subsequent policy, the entire course of his reign."

Nikolai Basargin

"The roar of the cannon on Senate Square awoke an entire generation."

Alexander Herzen

THE TSAR SAVAGELY DEALT WITH THE INSURGENTS

Mass arrests began on the very evening of 14 December. Some of those who took part in the insurrection were seized on the spot with their weapons in their hands. In addition, the government possessed information on more than forty members of the secret organisation through the reports of informers. The interrogations yielded many new names. Hundreds of people were thrown into the gloomy cells of the SS Peter and Paul Fortress, where the best sons of Russia—revolutionaries, progressive public figures, thinkers, writers and scholars, were buried alive. All in all, 579 people were interrogated about the Decembrist affair. It was a political trial unprecedented in Russia for its scope.

On 17 December 1825, the Privy Committee of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair was set up. Every day for a period of five months it conducted interrogations of the detainees. They began at six in the evening and continued long into the night. In their reminiscences, the Decembrists noted the inquisitorial method of the enquiry: provocative questions, blackmail, threats.

Many of the Decembrists were first questioned by Nicholas I himself. Some he threatened with death, others he sought to persuade, promising them "total pardon" in return for "frank" statements, yet others he tried to shame... On sending the detainees to the cells of the SS Peter and Paul Fortress, he indicated in the accompanying letters to the commandant of the Fortress (150 such letters have survived) who was to be held and in what conditions. For their stubbornness during the enquiry, 22 Decembrists were, on the tsar's personal instructions, kept in irons for several months.

The prisoners varied in their behaviour during interrogation. They rejected everything, led the enquiry

astray, tried to conceal many things and to present events in a light favourable to themselves. And some even "repented" and wrote letters of repentance to the emperor. Torn from their previous lives, they found themselves alone with representatives of their own class whose well-being they had been preparing to destroy. The pressure of solitary confinement was psychologically intensified by the bitter realisation that beyond the fortress walls there was no one who shared their beliefs, no support. The Decembrists found it hard to come to terms with their defeat, seeing in it the defeat of the idea of a military coup and the end of all their hopes.

Nicholas I, seeking to learn all he could during the interrogations, not only used threats, but also played the hypocrite. "Why do you want a revolution? I myself am the revolution!" he said pompously. Nicholas expressed his intention of carrying through reforms, and the arrested free-thinkers began to hope that the tsar would understand their noble aspirations and draw them into the process of state transformation. However, this was their last illusion, the collapse of which still awaited them...

There can be no doubt that the Decembrists also reproached themselves for shedding the blood of their soldiers, whom they had brought out onto the square. The leaders of the Secret Society were tortured by the idea that they had drawn comrades into it and thus broken their lives. From the documents it is known how Ryleyev suffered over this. "Most merciful Sire," he wrote to the tsar, "I ask one grace of you: be merciful to my comrades; they are all people with excellent gifts and noble sentiments." Ryleyev tried to take all the blame onto himself: "I consider myself to be the main culprit in the events of 14 December... If an execution is necessary for the good of Russia, then I alone deserve it."

On 3 June 1826, the Supreme Criminal Court began its sittings. It was composed of people particularly close to and trusted by the tsar, representatives of the titled aristocracy and top-ranking officials, the majority of whom were pillars of reaction,—"pathetic old men, who had grown grey in servility and intrigue", wrote the Russian thinker and revolutionary Nikolai Ogaryov later.[1] However, in practice the supreme judge was the tsar himself. His autocratic will decided who was to be condemned and who pardoned. The court was held in camera. There were no pleadings, no speeches for the defence—and no defendants at the sittings. The court saw the con-

demned Decembrists only on the day when the sentences were read out. When, early in the morning of 12 July 1826, the prisoners were led out of their cells, they asked each other in surprise: "Have we already been tried?" "Already found guilty," came the reply.

The Supreme Criminal Court handed down the harshest penalty. The defendants were divided into 11 categories according to the degree of guilt, 37 defendants in the first category were condemned to death. Nicholas I extended to them his "royal clemency": the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life or for a term of 20 years in Siberia. The rest were condemned to penal servitude, exile and reduction to the rank of private. Pestel, Ryleyev, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Bestuzhev-Riumin and Kakhovsky, placed "outside the categories" by the court, were sentenced to death by quartering, but then, "in accord with royal clemency", the court brought in the decision that "for their heinous offences, these criminals are to be hanged". The sentence was to be carried out in the early hours of 13 July.

At 3 o'clock in the morning those condemned to penal servitude, exile and reduction to the ranks were led out of their cells into the courtyard of the SS Peter and Paul Fortress. They were surrounded by troops specially brought in advance. The penalty of reduction to the ranks proceeded rapidly: the condemned men were stripped of their uniforms, military decorations and medals, which were thrown into blazing bonfires, and their swords, filed through in preparation, were broken over their heads. Ivan Yakushkin recalled that this ceremony was attended by representatives of a few "foreign embassies": "They were, it is said, surprised that people who, in half an hour, were to be deprived of everything that is usually valued in life walked without any hesitation and conversed cheerfully amongst themselves."

Dawn came. The five men condemned to death were led out from the fortress. Kakhovsky was in front. Behind him came Muravyov-Apostol, supporting Bestuzhev-Riumin under the arm, then Pestel and Ryleyev. They were wearing the same uniforms and frock coats in which they had been captured. On their legs they had leg irons. On the chest of each hung a black tablet with the inscription "Regicide". Seeing the scaffold, Pestel said bitterly: "Have we really deserved no better death? I don't recall that we ever turned away from bullets or cannon-balls. They could have chosen the firing squad."

It was 5.30 in the morning of 13 July 1826. The last minute had come. The five condemned men were led up to the gallows. They were stripped of their uniforms and dressed in long white shirts. Their hands were bound behind their backs and they were led up onto the scaffold. They drew close to each other to say farewell, turning their backs to each other to shake each other's bound hands. The executioner threw a hood over their heads and put the noose round their necks. Drums struck up. The boards were knocked out from under the condemned. Three of them—Ryleyev, Kakhovsky and Sergei Muravyov-Apostol—fell to the ground as their ropes snapped. The Governor-General of St Petersburg, Golenishchev-Kutuzov, who was in charge of the execution, rode up. "Hang them, hang them again, quickly!" he cried to the executioners.

..."The operation was repeated, and this time completed successfully," reported Berkopf, superintendent of the crownwork where the execution took place.

Thus perished the loyal sons of the Fatherland...

Harsh penalties were inflicted upon the insurgent soldiers—the men of the Moscow Regiment, the Royal Grenadier Regiment and the Chernigovsky Regiment. The investigation and trial was held in various places. Many of the soldiers who took part in the insurrection were sent into active service in the Caucasus. Hundreds more were transferred to other regiments or sent to serve in remote fortified posts. Those who had taken the most active part in the "rebellion", 178 men, were made to run the gauntlet of a thousand soldiers from once to twelve times. For the majority this punishment proved lethal. Those who survived were sent to Siberia.

The reprisals taken by the tsar against the Decembrists shocked contemporaries by their savagery, became a personal tragedy for progressive people, evoking horror and amazement at this unnatural triumph of arbitrary violence over reason and humanity. "In order to add to death immortality," wrote Alexander Herzen, "he [Nicholas I.—*Comp.*] replaced the axe by the rope. This hangman did not realise that in so doing he was turning the gallows into a cross before which more than one generation would bow."

Execution, penal servitude and exile could not destroy the Decembrist cause. "You may eliminate people, but not ideas," wrote the exiled Lunin in Siberia. Russia deeply sympathised with the Decembrists, and admired

their selfless exploit. A typical incident is related by Alexander Muravyov in his reminiscences: en route, when the exiled Decembrists were being taken to Siberia "...while they were changing the horses, a young man, having pushed aside our guards, burst into the room where we were and said: 'Gentlemen, have courage, you are suffering for the most wonderful, the most noble cause! Even in Siberia you will find sympathy!' "

At the beginning of 1827, the great Pushkin wrote his famous "Message to Siberia", to his Decembrist friends languishing in exile:

"Deep in Siberia's mines, let naught
Subdue your proud and patient spirit.
Your crushing toil and lofty thought
Shall not be wasted—do not fear it.

Pushkin received an answer from the Decembrist poet, Alexander Odoyevsky:

'Tis not in vain we labour here,
The spark will light a flame;
A torch to guide our people forth
In freedom's holy name.

Swords will we forge out of our chains,
And liberty restore,
Tyrants will tremble on their thrones,
*The people breathe once more.**

Thrown into their "penal lairs", the Decembrists did not betray their noble ideals, but continued, despite the harsh conditions of servitude and exile, to battle in word and deed against the absolutist regime. In May, 1828, at the Zerentui mine in Siberia, Ivan Sukhinov prepared an uprising to free his comrades. The conspiracy was discovered, Sukhinov did not await the execution of the sentence, and took his own life in his cell. A series of pamphlets written by Lunin condemning the autocracy, the injustice of the tsarist court in its judgement of the Decembrists, provoked a new wave of anger on the part of the Russian autocrat. Lunin was sent from his place of exile to the most sombre prison in Siberia—Akatui, and there he died.

The exiled Decembrists carried out considerable educational work. In remote Siberian villages they opened

* Translated by Irina Zheleznova.

schools for village children, wrote articles and reminiscences. Tsarism failed to isolate the Decembrists from progressive thought in Russia, or progressive thinkers from the Decembrists. The first Russian revolutionaries were bound by a thousand links to their native land, were informed about current events in Russia and abroad. In this they owed an incalculable debt to their wives, who followed them voluntarily into exile. This "heroic act of selfless love" by these remarkable Russian women has always been remembered by their descendants.

Of the condemned Decembrists, only 43 lived to hear the amnesty proclaimed by Alexander II on the day of his coronation, 26 August 1856. However, the coronation manifesto, which brought the "noble captives" home from thirty years of exile, did not grant them a full pardon. The Decembrists were forbidden to live in Moscow or St Petersburg, and they were put under secret police surveillance.

The majority of those who returned from exile found the strength to join in public affairs: they took part in preparations for and the implementation of the reform of 1861, which freed the peasants from serfdom, and also in the application of other reforms in the courts and local government, contributed to newspapers and journals. Some of the Decembrists were even in secret correspondence with Alexander Herzen's free Russian press abroad.[2]

The uprising on 14 December was an important link in the general European revolutionary movement. Had the Decembrists achieved victory over Russian tsarism this would have played an enormous role in the development of the revolutionary movement in the West. Nicholas I, other European monarchs and reactionary politicians were well aware of this. Following the suppression of the insurrection, Nicholas I, in a conversation with the French ambassador Saint-Priest, declared: "I believe that I have done a service to all governments". Saint-Priest himself reported to his court: ..."if the insurrection of Russian officers in December 1825 had succeeded, then the whole order [i.e. the 'order' defended by the reactionary Holy Alliance.—*Comp.*] would have been shaken to the ground, and the whole of Europe would have found itself under its debris". European monarchs, congratulating Nicholas I on his victory over the Decembrists, wrote that he had thereby "merited the gratitude of all foreign states and rendered the greatest service to all thrones".

The contemporaries of the Decembrists clearly perceived the significance of their ideas and their struggle against the feudal-absolutist system in Russia. The lines written by Pushkin in his message to Siberia: "Your crushing toil and lofty thought shall not be wasted" are evidence of his profound and accurate assessment of the role of ideas of freedom and the revolutionary exploit of the Decembrists. The poet believed that the weapons fallen from the hands of the Decembrists would be seized by a new generation of freedom fighters.

A few years passed—and again the banner inscribed with the free-thinking ideas of the Decembrists was raised over Russia by the remarkable Russian thinkers and revolutionaries, Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Ogaryov. While still young they had sworn to dedicate their lives to the struggle to liberate their homeland from the yoke of serfdom and autocracy. In his *The Past and Reflections*, a vast work of memoirs and essays, Herzen wrote: "I do not know how it happened ... but I felt that I was not on the side of the grape-shot and victory, prison and chains. The execution of Pestel and his colleagues finally woke the childhood sleep of my soul." These friends and companions in the struggle were faithful to their vow. The Decembrists became for them a symbol of struggle. On the cover of the *Polar Star*, an almanac published by Herzen in London, the silhouettes of the five executed Decembrists spoke more eloquently than words of the aims of the free Russian press.

Alexander Herzen's high esteem for the exploit of the Decembrists indicated the continuity of the revolutionary tradition, the natural inevitability of the next stage in the liberation movement: "The roar of the cannon on Senate Square awoke an entire generation".

However, Herzen was unable to analyse the class meaning of the Decembrist movement, overestimated the maturity of Decembrist ideology and idealised the Decembrists themselves.

A profound and integral definition of the class character of the Decembrist movement was given by Lenin, who defined the position of the Decembrists in the history of the Russian revolutionary struggle. In 1900, the first issue of the Leninist newspaper *Iskra* came out with a prophetic epigraph—a line from the poem by Odoyevsky: "The spark will light a flame". By this choice of epigraph, Lenin emphasised the revolutionary nature of the Decembrist movement and the con-

tinuity of revolutionary generations.

Yes, the Decembrists were the first. "Should we not begin simply because we will not, perhaps, see the end?" wrote Nikolai Turgenev in his diary. The Russia of serfdom was then oppressed and lethargic. The mass of the people, in Lenin's words, "were still sunk in torpor" (V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, Moscow, 1977, p. 433). The narrow circle of revolutionary aristocrats proved powerless without the support of the people. Decades passed. The Russian people acquired enormous revolutionary experience. The working class joined the front ranks in the powerful liberation movement. In February 1917, the peoples of Russia overthrew tsarism, and in October, having brought about the first socialist revolution in the world, they put an end forever to the rule of the landowners and the bourgeoisie.

"THE COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY, COMPOSED OF OBSEQUIOUS COURTIERS, ACTED ... IN AN INQUISITORIAL SPIRIT."

Mikhail Fonvizin on the Enquiry into the Decembrists' Affair and Their Trial. From "A Review of the Manifestations of Political Life in Russia"[1]

The Committee of Enquiry began to conduct searches; a large number of people were seized in St Petersburg on suspicion of being involved in secret societies; others were brought to the SS Peter and Paul Fortress from every corner of Russia. At first some were questioned in the palace by the emperor himself; the accused were brought to him with their hands bound behind their backs, as if being taken to a police station and not a royal residence. The sovereign of Russia, forgetful of his dignity, permitted himself to shout abuse at people who were defenceless, completely in his power, and threatened them with harsh reprisals. The Privy Committee of Enquiry, composed of obsequious courtiers, acted in the same inquisitorial spirit.

The accused were held in the most rigorous confinement in the fortress dungeons, in endless expectation and fear of being subjected to torture if they persisted in their denials. Many of them heard such threats in the mouths of members of the Committee of Enquiry. Against the

captives were used methods which seized their imagination and filled them with apprehension, tormented now with the fear of torture, now with illusory hopes, in order to wring from them a confession. The door to the cell would suddenly open in the night; a blanket was thrown over the head of the prisoner and he was led down corridors and passages into the brightly-lit administrative office. There, when the blanket had been removed from his head, the members of the Committee put to him questions that were a matter of life and death and, without giving him time to think, coarsely demanded immediate and satisfactory answers. In the name of the tsar they promised the accused clemency in return for a sincere confession, refused to accept any vindications, invented non-existent testimony allegedly given by his colleagues, and often refused to allow face-to-face meetings. Those who did not give the desired answers, either through ignorance of the events about which they were being asked, or out of fear of condemning the innocent through a careless word, were taken to a dark, dank cell, put on a ration of bread and water, and weighed down with heavy hand and leg irons. The fortress physician was given the task of determining whether or not the prisoner was in a condition to withstand even harsher corporal punishments.

After this, could the admissions of the accused, obtained by such violent means, be considered voluntary? Often they were not genuine, and the testimony of some of the accused, whose morale had collapsed, contained things which were incredible and ridiculous to such a degree that no man in his right mind and aware of what he was doing could have said such things to his own and others' detriment. All these products of the disturbed imagination of some of the prisoners is presented as genuine intent and activity in the report[2] of the Privy Committee of Enquiry: the one who drew up this act made use of them and contrived to give the appearance of verisimilitude to his mixture of distorted truth, fiction and lies, not only in order to condemn the accused, but also so as to blacken their moral character and the purity of their intentions.

Of all the members of the Privy Committee of Enquiry, the then minister of war, Prince Chernyshev, was the most partial and unscrupulous: questioning the accused, he fell into a fury, indulged in the most base invectives—in a word, acted like the well-known English

judge Jeffries[3] in the political trials under Charles II and James II. Prince Alexander Golitsyn and Adjutant-General Count Benkendorf[4] conducted themselves more worthily.

The report of the Privy Committee of Enquiry was the only formal accusation on the basis of which all those involved in the secret societies were judged. In this report, the actions of many of the members are deliberately misrepresented, often contemptuously, to resemble childish pranks. The main accusation brought against the majority of the members of the union was that of planning regicide against the person of the Emperor Alexander I, despite the fact that, a few years later, he had died peacefully of illness at Taganrog.

Any expression of spontaneous dissatisfaction or indignation provoked by some disreputable act on the part of the supreme authorities was not only treated as if it were proof of deliberate intent, but termed a crime already committed. For a hasty word or thought expressed several years earlier in the heat of debate and recanted the next day, one was convicted of planning regicide. However, according to our laws, any criminal intent, if the one who has conceived of it has voluntarily refused to implement it, is not liable to judgement. Here, however, an unconsidered conversation among intimate friends, sometimes over a glass of champagne and not having any consequences, is given the importance of a crime against the state.

The report by the Committee of Enquiry does not present a single circumstance, a single action by the accused which might arouse the sympathy of their compatriots. How many statements were made by many of them, which depicted in its true light the situation then existing in Russia, suffering under the centuries-old scourge of autocracy! How many accurate pictures of the chaotic disorder in the legislature and the administration! How many lessons for the government itself to use to cure the grievous sores gnawing at Russia... All these bitter truths and many others were frankly and sincerely stated by the accused, yet, however, the Committee of Enquiry says nothing about them in its report to the monarch. Throughout the whole of this political trial, the government acted with unprecedented partiality, both as the plaintiff or the side bringing the charge, and also as an infuriated, implacable judge. What justice can be expected when there was deliberate violation of the

few judicial regulations and procedures which exist to protect the accused against arbitrary judgement and the partiality of prejudiced judges.

The Supreme Criminal Court, basing itself solely on the report of the Committee of Enquiry, was even unwilling to summon the accused and take from them the confirmatory and supplementary testimony that Russian laws permit. The accused saw their judges only once: on the day that their sentence was pronounced...

"THE SUPREME CRIMINAL COURT ... JUDGED AND CONDEMNED WITHOUT SEEING US, WITHOUT LISTENING TO US."

From the Reminiscences of Alexander Muravyov "My Journal"[1]

The St Petersburg Fortress[2]

The St Petersburg Fortress, facing the palace of the tsar, is a repulsive monument to autocracy, a fateful sign that they cannot exist the one without the other. The habit of seeing before one's eyes the cells in which languish the victims of autocracy must finally and inevitably blunt compassion for the sufferings of one's neighbour. Great God! Will the day ever dawn when they will understand that people were not created in order to be the plaything of a few privileged families? When the light of publicity shines out in our midst, the lawlessness now concealed behind those walls will provoke shudders!

There were not enough cells due to the large number of victims. Rooms serving as barracks for the garrison were converted into a prison. The glass in the windows, covered with a layer of chalk and glue, prevented the living rays of the sun from penetrating into these dungeons. Cages fashioned out of beams of wood were set up in the long rooms in these barracks, and were arranged in such a way as to prevent any communication between them. The prisoner could not take more than three or four steps diagonally across his cell. A cast iron pipe passed through several of these cells; they were not sufficiently high to prevent the heat from the pipe being felt, and this was a source of real torment to the prisoners.

We arrived, passing round the approach bridges to the

fortress, and stopped at the door into the house of the commandant. The courier transferred me into the hands of the deputy commandant, who, without saying a word, led me into a dirty, damp, small and gloomy room. A broken table, a filthy old bed and an iron chain, one end of which was mounted into the wall, were its furnishing. After a journey of 360 versts covered with extraordinary speed, after four months of incarceration I was exhausted. When the deputy commandant went out, I threw myself down on the loathsome bed without undressing, and heard the bolts of the two doors of my cell being pushed home.

So I was alone, cut off from life! I spent hours lying down, thinking of my mother, my brother, who, as I knew, was imprisoned in the same fortress as myself. Tears came to my eyes. I prayed, and this comforted me. A feeling of joy entered my soul. I felt pride at sharing the fate of my wonderful brother.[3] Cheered, I stood up and walked around my cell. Suddenly I heard once again the sound of the bolts. The deputy commandant appeared to take me to the commandant of the St Petersburg Fortress, General Sukin, an old invalid whom I had known from childhood. He received me sitting at his table, acted as if he did not recognise me and asked me my name. I answered that my name was Muravyov, an officer in the Cavalierguards Regiment. At this he had the civility to say to me: "I still grieve over the memory of your worthy papa,[4] who in you has an outcast". I boiled at these caustic words, but a feeling of pity immediately overcame me as I looked at this unhappy old man, brutalised by servility to the point where he could remain indifferent to the sufferings of those who did not share his opinions.

Following this meeting I returned to my cell, but this time I was happy to be alone.

I remained in my cell without movement, deprived of light, without food, for a period of eight days. In the morning the jailor, accompanied by a guard, would bring me bread and water.

One morning the doors to my cell were opened at an unusual hour. It was General Stukalov, whom I had also known earlier. He conducted himself as a gentleman: with tears in his eyes he sighed on seeing me, asked about my health, then—when I left Revel, whether I had any news about my mother—and left me... Once a month the emperor sent one of his adjutant-generals to visit the

prisoners, instructing them to say that he was deeply interested in their fate. This mark of attention concealed the aim of discovering the convictions of the prisoners and, at the same time, deceiving our poor relatives.

The food was disgusting. The money allocated for our rations was stolen by the officials and—at their head—the old deputy commandant. A number of the prisoners were on bread and water, many had irons on their hands and feet. It was the emperor himself who, on receiving the report of the Committee of Enquiry, prescribed this "diet", as he also ordered the conditions of our imprisonment to be made harsher. Psychological torture was used. The prisoners received heart-rending letters from their unfortunate relatives, who, deceived by superficial kindnesses, were loud in their praises of the magnanimity of one who never showed any. The prison chaplain[5] was instructed to bring us the comforts of religion and, in particular, to call upon us to confess. When he came to know us more closely, he told us how he had been deceived in our respect. The bloody finale that crowned our trial amazed him and left him highly indignant. Many of the prisoners were ill, many had lost their wits, and some attempted to take their own lives...

The Committee of Enquiry

This Committee was composed of the Minister of War, an incompetent old man who occupied the seat of the chairman, Grand Prince Mikhail, judge and litigant in his own case, General Dibich, a Prussian who, like many adventurists of foreign blood, enjoyed the favour of the tsar, General Kutuzov, Governor-General of St Petersburg, Prince Golitsyn, ex-minister of religious affairs, and generals Potapov, Levashov and Chernyshev.[6] Colonel Adlerberg, Imperial Adjutant, attended in order to take notes which he presented every day to his sovereign.

This inquisitorial tribunal gathered in the home of the commandant of the St Petersburg Fortress. To begin with it held its meetings at midnight; however, when they began to speed up the trial in order to bring it to a conclusion, the meetings took place day and night. When these meetings were held at night, the prisoner, weak from suffering and lack of food, was obliged to appear before our judges. The deputy commandant or one of his assistants went to fetch the prisoner from his cell, threw a

blanket over his head, and then, taking him by the arm, led him out of the cell and silently down the corridors and passages of the fortress. Only when they reached the brightly-lit room where the Committee was holding its meeting was the blanket removed. Without leaving him any time to gather his thoughts, the court officials in their glittering uniforms began to put questions upon which depended his life or death, demanding quick and categorical answers about facts totally unknown to the man being questioned. If he maintained silence, this was taken as a further and final offence.

The Committee possessed as its guidelines in the details of this complex affair two reports, those of Sherwood and Maiboroda, and also the papers seized during the searches made in the apartments of the accused.

It was precisely in this way that the draft constitution drawn up by my brother had fallen into their hands. It proved more difficult to find the draft constitution drawn up by Pestel, who had taken the precaution of burying at an unknown spot this labour of many years. Thanks to Maiboroda, the Committee received information about its location. Lachinov, one of the members of the Southern Society and the one who had hidden the document, was reduced to the ranks. This Secret Committee (such was its name) was an inquisitorial tribunal that lacked respect, human consideration, any shadow of justice or impartiality—but showed a profound ignorance of the law. When it became totally absorbed in the task of concluding its work as quickly as possible, it confused together guilty and innocent in order to earn praise for its speed. All these courtiers, having no other purpose in life than that of servile adulation of their sovereign, admitted no possibility of political convictions that differed from their own—and these were our judges! Among them, Chernyshev and Levashov displayed particular malice against us; it was these two who were most frequently chosen as our interrogators. For them, all means were acceptable. They presented false statements, resorted to threats of direct confrontation which they then did not carry out. Their most frequent tactic was to assure the captive that his loyal friend had confessed everything. The accused, confused, cornered, tormented without pity or compassion, signed. When his friend was then brought into the committee room, he admitted nothing, as nothing had happened. The two accused ran to embrace each other, to the great amusement of the members of

the Committee. In the meantime, the death sentence for the condemned had already been signed. Colonel Falenberg of Main Headquarters, shaken morally by the incarceration, confessed to plans that he had never entertained; his friend, Prince Baryatinsky, pointed this out to him briefly and consistently in front of the Committee. The Committee, ignoring the mental disturbance affecting Falenberg,[7] was loud in its praise of his confession and—condemned him! One officer of the Guards Naval Crew, who was barely 19 years old, Divov, whom prison and harsh treatment had also mentally affected, accused himself of seeing one and the same dream while in prison, in which he struck the emperor down with a dagger. The Committee was shameless enough to turn this into a charge against him. I am citing only the most glaring instances. It sometimes happened that these gentlemen of the Committee would say with naive good cheer: "Hurry up with your confession—you are making us wait and our dinner will be cold".

One particular task given to the Committee was that of presenting us as regicides; this piece of abuse was intended for the populace, which listens but does not think.

To the question of regicide, Colonel Lunin, famous for his wit and energetic character, replied: "Gentlemen, the Secret Society never had regicide as its aim, as its aim was more noble and elevated. However, as you know, this idea is nothing new in Russia—there are quite recent examples of it!" Two of the members of the Committee—Tatishchev and Kutuzov—were involved in the bloody death of Emperor Pavel.[8] The reply struck home, and the Committee was left in confusion.

The Committee tried every means it could to force Nikita Muravyov to admit that the Northern Society wished a republic. Losing his patience at their relentlessness, Nikita Muravyov answered: "My draft constitution, which you have in your hands, is monarchical, but if you wish to know—experience has strengthened the original direction of my political convictions, and now I loudly declare: in my heart and my convictions I am a republican!"

The accused, on being taken back to his cell, was immediately visited by the chaplain. Those members who were not deeply compromised amused themselves and mystified the Committee. Among these was Captain Gorsky who, to the question as to the motives which had led him to become a member of the Secret Society,

replied: "Simply following fashion". Finally, there were also comical scenes. Major Rayevsky, a man of outstanding keenness of mind, spoke of the Germans in a way that caused Dibich to move uncomfortably in his chair. Prince Shakhovskoy did not admit to anything, but was nonetheless condemned to exile.[9] Colonel Grabbe,[10] well-known for the nobility of his character, and a man with an excellent service record, when questioned by Chernyshev, challenged the latter's competence, explaining that during the campaign of 1814, in one encounter which he had had with the enemy, he had called in vain upon Chernyshev and his troop to join him, and that Chernyshev, not wishing to share the danger, had been insulted by him, Grabbe.

Count Zakhar Chernyshev was condemned simply because his judge shared the same surname. The grandfather of Count Zakhar[11] had established a vast entail, to which General Chernyshev, member of the Committee, without having the slightest relationship to the Field-marshal who had established this entail, was insolent enough to lay claim to possession of the property of a family unrelated to him in any way.

...The Committee of Enquiry, appointed on 17 December 1825, immediately began its sittings, which it finished on 30 May 1826. It transferred the whole case to the Supreme Criminal Court, which heard it with all possible speed, as it judged and condemned without seeing us, without listening to us.

The sentence was carried out less than 24 hours after it had been read out to us.

The Sentence

On the morning of 12 July 1826, royal carriages escorted by a squadron of Cavalierguards brought the Supreme Court to the house of the commandant of the fortress. We were assembled in various rooms according to our categories,[12] and then ordered to enter a long room where our judges, whom we were seeing for the first time, were sitting round a horseshoe-shaped table. This was the most curious meeting one could imagine. The State Secretary read the verdict and sentence in a resonant voice. Then, surrounded by soldiers, we were returned to our cells.

The night is a suitable time for crime, at two o'clock in the morning of 13 July, the sentence was carried out. Despite the secrecy with which they wished to surround

it, many people had gathered on the square for the execution. We had the happiness of seeing each other again for the second time in 24 hours. We embraced each other. I threw myself into my brother's arms; on seeing me, he exclaimed: "Have they condemned you too, my dear Alexander, to die with us!"

We were led into the square formed by the troops on the quadrangle surrounding the fortress. On one of the bastions we could see the scaffold, fitted with five ropes with sliding nooses. The uniforms were removed from those who were wearing one, thrown onto the fire, and swords were broken over their heads. Dressed in white gowns, we were led back into the prison. As we left the quadrangle, our five martyrs were executed...

As the execution was being carried out, couriers rode to Tsarskoye Selo, where Emperor Nicholas was waiting for the accomplishment of this fateful act in order to be able to go to bed and sleep. One unhappy lieutenant, the son of a soldier, holder of the St George Cross, refused to obey the order to accompany the five condemned men to their execution. "I have served with honour," said this noble-hearted man, "and I do not wish in my declining years to become an executioner of those whom I respect". Count Zubov, a Colonel with the Cavalier-guards, refused to ride at the head of his squadron in order to be present during the execution. "They are my colleagues, and I shall not go," was his reply.

"WITH ONE AUTOCRATIC STROKE OF HIS PEN, HE CAN HAND US ALL OVER TO DEATH."

Nikolai Lorer on His Interrogation in the Winter Palace. From His Recollections[1]

The following day, when it was still dark outside, I was ordered to go with the courier. My escort was in uniform and wearing white gloves, the detainee—in a frock coat and peaked cap! Chernyshev's town carriage was waiting at the entrance, and when we reached the door, I, out of politeness, requested the courier to enter ahead of me; but he let me pass in front of him, and I remembered Marshal Ney.[2] When he was being taken to the place of execution, he also, pointing to the tumbril in the presence of the accompanying priest, said: "Be seated. But I will be there first", and raised his eyes to the sky.

On the way I asked him: "Are you taking me to the fortress?" "No, to the palace, where His Majesty the Emperor wishes to see you." "I beg your pardon, but everyone is still asleep."

At this point he told me that the next day he was leaving for Moscow to fetch a new detainee...

I was taken to the main guardhouse at the Winter Palace. A candle was burning on the table, on the couch an arrested officer was sleeping, not one of ours...

How often, when serving in the Guards, I had stood here on duty with my company. The same greenish walls, the same armchair, and an officer on duty dozing in it as ever, wearing a scarf. Shortly thereafter the officer on duty, having left when I arrived, returned with eight soldiers in grey uniforms and their sabres at the ready, and this entire company surrounded me... I was watching these manoeuvres, amazed, when the duty officer of the Preobrazhensky Regiment addressed me with the words: "Permit me to search you", and I gave him my snuff box, a small medallion of my beloved sister and, as I recall, 25 roubles in small coin, that is, everything I had with me. At that moment the courier came running in, a small, light-haired man, and said, rather out of breath: "The detainee to His Majesty the Emperor". I wanted to follow him, but seeing that the eight grey Guards were preparing to take me under guard, I stopped and said to the duty officer that "for the moment I am still a Major in the Russian Army wearing a uniform which is worn with honour by the whole army, and not a criminal condemned by the law, and I will not take a single step voluntarily with a guard". The captain apologised, explaining that such were the regulations.

"Do you want to turn the palace into a police station," I said indignantly. "Who is the Adjutant-General on duty?"

"Levashov".

"Please take the trouble to send someone, perhaps the courier, to ask the General to permit me to appear in front of His Majesty without a guard."

Soon afterwards the messenger returned with the permission, and I went with him to the Hermitage, which was illuminated as if for a ball. Levashov was sitting behind the table. When I entered, he stood up and bowed to me. The General then commented on my unwillingness to obey the general rules for a guardhouse. I repeated my arguments and added that I would also not leave

this room except alone insofar as I was not condemned by the law... Levashov smiled and twisted his moustache. I knew him when he was the commander of the Life Hussar Regiment: he was always a brilliant officer, and was considered one of the best men in the saddle of the whole Guards. The General recognised me and ended our conversation with the words: "I knew you as an excellent officer, and you could have been of service to your country, but now I only regret to find you in this unpleasant position. Chernyshev[3] is dissatisfied with you and has complained to His Majesty about your insincere confession. Kindly wait for His Majesty here, behind the screen", and thereupon he indeed indicated a screen standing in the corner. There I found an armchair, sat down, and began to prepare myself mentally in order to be able to answer the sovereign decently, but with a sense of my own dignity. I did not wish to justify myself, and there was no reason to... My preparations had not continued very long when I heard a noise, and Levashov, having put his head round the screen, asked me to present myself. His Majesty was approaching from the other end of the room, wearing the coat of the Izmailovsky Regiment with all the hooks and buttons fastened. His face was pale and his hair ruffled... I had never seen him looking so ill-groomed.

I stepped resolutely towards him, but he gestured to me to stop quite some distance away, and himself advanced quietly, measuring me with his eyes. I bowed respectfully.

"Do you know our laws?" he began.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Do you know what fate awaits you? Death!" and he ran his hand along his throat as if my head should be struck from my shoulders instantly. There was no reply I could make to this eloquent gesture, and so I remained silent.

"Chernyshev spent considerable time seeking to persuade you to confess everything that you know and must know, but you dodged. You have no honour, my dear sir."

At this I involuntarily started, caught my breath, and responded automatically: "That is the first time I have heard that word, Sire..."

His Majesty immediately recalled himself and continued, speaking much more gently:

"You yourself are responsible, you yourself... Your former regimental commander is doomed,[4] there is no

hope for him... But you must tell me everything, do you hear ... or else you, too, will perish as he will..."

"Your Majesty," I began, "I can add nothing further to my answers in my written statement.[5] I was never a conspirator, a Jacobin. I was always an opponent of a republic, loved His Majesty, the late emperor, and only desired, for the good of my country, fundamental and equitable laws. Perhaps I erred, but I thought and acted according to my convictions..."

His Majesty listened to me attentively and suddenly, coming up to me, quickly took me by the shoulders, turned me towards the light of the lamp and boldly looked me in the eyes. This movement and his action surprised me, afterwards I supposed that His Majesty was looking to see if I had dark eyes, as he superstitiously believed such to be the eyes of true Carbonari and liberals, but he saw grey eyes, with nothing fearful about them. That was the reason why, later, Nicholas exiled Lermontov[6]—he could not bear his look... His Majesty whispered something into Levashov's ear and left.

Thus ended my audience.

Yet how bitterly I was deceived in him! Being so young—and youth is characterised by humaneness, humanity—I thought that he would speak with me quite differently, like one man to another, and not like a brigade commander.

Why did he shout, try to frighten people who were already in his hands? As if we did not know that with one autocratic stroke of his pen, he could hand us all over to death. However, I learned later from many of my colleagues that with me the sovereign had deigned to converse, whereas many of them he had simply berated...

"EMPEROR NICHOLAS REVEALED IN OUR CASE SUCH BITTERNESS AGAINST US, SUCH AN INHUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF AUTOCRATIC POWER, AND AT THE SAME TIME SUCH A FEAR OF LIBERAL IDEAS, OF EVERYTHING THAT HAD ANY HINT OF OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT, THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO GUESS IN ADVANCE ALL HIS SUBSEQUENT POLICY."

From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin[1]

Nikolai Basargin (1799-1861), a lieutenant and adjutant to the chief of Main Headquarters of the 2nd Army, stationed in the

south of Russia, joined the Union of Welfare in 1820 and collaborated actively with Pestel in the organisation of the Southern Society. The Supreme Criminal Court condemned Basargin to penal servitude for life; the tsar's confirmation of the sentence reduced it to twenty years, followed by exile in Siberia. Basargin was the author of a number of essays and of reminiscences.

...On the morning of 8 January 1826, I went to headquarters as usual and sat down to my work. The General on duty sent for me and, pointing to an order from the Minister of War, told me that, together with many others, I was to be arrested and sent to St Petersburg...

On the way we frequently met other detainees with couriers and gendarmes. We could not talk with any of them... At last we arrived in St Petersburg and were taken to Main Headquarters. There we were received by the senior adjutant, Yakovlev, if I remember correctly. He wrote something down, and ordered us to be taken to the palace guardhouse...

In the course of the day, several more prisoners arrived. Some of them I had seen before in Moscow. These were Colonel Grabbe and Alexander Muravyov; they were also put in separate rooms. In the evening I was taken to the palace, to the chambers of the sovereign, to be questioned. In the room, where I was placed behind a screen, people were constantly hurrying to and fro with trays and cups. About five minutes later an officer of the Courier Corps took my arm and led me into a large room hung with pictures. I recognised the Hermitage gallery. A small table had been opened up near the wall, and at it was sitting General Levashov with an ink-stand and several sheets of paper in front of him. He requested me to sit opposite him, but then the same courier came in and reported the arrival of Prince Volkonsky (a member of the society, a major-general). Then Levashov excused himself very politely, explaining that he would have to defer my interrogation until the following day. I was again taken to the former room in the guardhouse.

The next day, in the morning, I was once more taken for questioning. Levashov was sitting in his former place, and I had just had time to sit down opposite him when His Majesty came in wearing a frock coat without epaulettes. I stood up and bowed to him. "Speak the whole truth," he said severely. "If you hide anything, then you will only have yourself to blame." With these words he went out through the opposite door. Levashov again pointed to my place and began questioning me: "When

did you join the Society and who accepted you?" he asked, preparing to take down my replies. "Your Excellency," I said, "not considering myself a member of a Secret Society, I most certainly do not know what to say to you." "So, you do not wish to say anything?" he retorted. "Think about it, it can only hurt you. The government knows everything without your testimony." I was silent. "You, sir, do not wish to trust to the clemency of His Majesty, and are compelling him to treat you with all the severity of our laws. You will, as he himself said to you, only have yourself to blame." After this he made a brief note, left the room for a moment to give it to the courier, and then ordered me to follow him. This note, in all probability, was addressed to the commandant of the fortress, and signed by the sovereign...

Having called at the guardhouse to collect my few belongings, I left with the courier for the fortress. There he presented me to the commandant and handed him the note from Levashov. General Sukin sent for the deputy commandant and handed me over to him; I went with the deputy commandant and his assistant to the corner of the crownwork, and passed along some dark corridors to the cell I was to occupy—a small room four paces long and four paces wide, with a white-washed window, a hospital bed, a table and a small iron stove. Here the deputy commandant stripped me completely, examined everything I had been wearing, removed even my wedding ring, and then, taking that with him, left me two shirts, a coat, trousers and a hospital gown. When he left, the door was bolted behind him. A guard was patrolling the corridor, and he often glanced in at me through the small window in the door which was covered with sacking on his side.

Anyone in Russia who has not experienced arrest in a fortress cannot imagine the sombre, hopeless feeling, that depression or, even more, despair which, not gradually but suddenly, overwhelms the man who has stepped across the threshold of the cell. All his contacts with the world are broken, all links severed. He is alone in the face of an absolute, unrestricted power which is displeased with him, which can do with him what it wills, first subject him to every deprivation, and then even forget him, and there is no help forthcoming from anywhere, not even a sound on his behalf. Ahead lies gradual moral and physical exhaustion; he abandons any hope in the future, each minute he imagines that he is buried alive,

with all the horrors of this situation. After thirty years of exile, filled with many sufferings, I still shudder when I remember the first day which I spent in that cell in the St Peter and Paul Fortress. I am amazed that in our age, when philanthropic ideas are not considered a dream, an utopia, when rulers themselves and earthly lords seek to some degree to harmonise their actions with them, when torture has been abolished everywhere and is recognised by all to be a useless cruelty, that there should still exist solitary confinement in a fortress. This moral torture is more harsh, more destructive for a man than physical torture.

What I felt and lived through on the first day of imprisonment in my cell cannot be described. On the one hand, recollections of what had happened, still so fresh in my mind, on the other—the complete horror of the present and a future without hope. That night I sprang up several times from my hard couch and could not understand where I was. I did not sleep, but drowsed restlessly, which only further troubled by confused thoughts. I waited impatiently for the light of day, and already imagined that my mind was disturbed. The morning found me completely exhausted.

At about nine o'clock the guard opened the cell and brought me a bun, two lumps of sugar, a cup and a teapot with very watery tea. I remember how happy I was on getting this. My first thought was: it would seem I have not been forgotten, they remember I am still alive, are concerned about my existence. I began to drink the tea, and in the meantime the warden was clearing up something in the cell; to my questions about something or other he made no reply. I asked the guard on the other side of the door what time it was—the same silence. The clock itself replied: at that moment the clock on the fortress belfry struck nine.

I must admit that, during the first two weeks of my imprisonment I was so weakened morally, so dispirited, that to this day I thank God that I was not then summoned to face the Committee. It is not hard to realise that, in such a condition, I would easily have made statements that would now torture my conscience.

During those two weeks I continually imagined that either I was already mad, or else would shortly become so. I found my every movement, my every action incompatible with common sense. If I addressed the warden with a question or a request, it immediately seemed to

me that, in my position, a man of clear mind would not occupy himself with such trivia. If, forgetful of myself, I began to sing some familiar tune, I immediately imagined that it was a sign of insanity. Finally even the very idea of insanity, which I was unable to banish, began to trouble me. It seemed that it was precisely this very idea which might make me mad, and that, unable to drive it away, I was already beginning to lose my mind.

I thank you, my Creator, that you gave me the opportunity and the strength to overcome this fatal train of thought. Having spent more than two weeks in this manner, I came to realise that I must think seriously about how to save myself from this situation. I realised that the only way to avoid thinking about it was to find myself some kind of occupation. But what occupation could I find in this cramped, airless and dark abode? I was given no books, nor was I permitted to have paper, pen and ink. At first I was unable to speak with anyone. The guard did not even answer my questions, but walked up and down the corridor like an automaton, lifting up the piece of sacking and observing what I was doing every quarter of an hour. Gradually the warden became accustomed to me, but it was clear that he was afraid to enter into conversation with me, wary of remaining with me unnecessarily...

At the end of January, I was summoned before the Committee for questioning. This happened at night, some time after ten o'clock. I was already asleep when the deputy commandant came in and ordered me to dress. My eyes were blindfolded, a hood was put over my head so that I could see nothing, and then I was taken by the arm and thus led out of the crownwork curtain. We went on sledges to the house of the commandant; the deputy commandant led me up the staircase into a moderately-sized room and sat me behind a screen. I heard people passing by, whispering, and finally someone came up to me, took me again by the arm and ordered me to go with him. "Take off the blindfold", my guide said, stopping. I took the kerchief from my eyes and saw a priest in front of me. It suddenly occurred to me that we were being shot secretly, and that the priest was to prepare me to die, but at that moment I realised the groundlessness of my supposition. The gentleman who had come up to me was some kind of court official. He immediately departed. The archpriest (of Kazansky Cathedral), Father Myslovsky, with whom many of our companions

subsequently came to be on close terms and whom they consider to this day to be a man who was sincerely sympathetic towards us, of which, however, in relation to myself, I was in no way aware and which, I frankly admit, I seriously doubt—invited me to take a seat on the couch and began to converse, assuring me that he had not come in order to arouse in me repentance and persuade me to confess; that although this was precisely the task the Committee had conferred on him and was part of his duty, yet he well realised that such a commission must inevitably make us suspicious of him; that, no less than this, it would be a great comfort to him to be able to remove this suspicion, which, moreover, he hoped to succeed in doing by his sincere attitude towards us: in that case, we would be fully convinced that he was nothing other than a zealous servant of the church, sent by God to comfort us in our sad imprisonment. To this he added that he could also be of service to us by transmitting our requests to the Committee and making every effort in our favour with those on whom depended their satisfaction; that this was, in fact, his sole aim, which had compelled him to accept the commission of the sovereign and the Committee. It is quite possible that I am mistaken, but then I did not believe, and I still now do not believe his words. I could give certain reasons for my mistrust of him; but, having heard later much in his favour from some of my colleagues, I fear to be unjust, and leave open the question as to whether he acted towards us directly, sincerely, or hypocritically. He is no longer with us and, of course, either he has received his deserved reward for his compassion, for his love for his neighbour, or must give a rigorous but just account of his duplicity.

I answered him rather coldly, possibly even with noticeable mistrust. Our conversation did not last long, and thereafter he came to my cell but once to hear my Lenten confession. After then I did not see him again. I was led away from him by the same route and again seated behind the screen. Shortly afterwards, however, I was taken somewhere else and ordered to remove the blindfold. Suddenly I found myself in a brightly-lit room in front of a table covered with a red cloth, near which were sitting all the members of our Committee in their uniforms and regalia. The presidential chair was occupied by General Tatishchev, to his left were Prince Golitsyn, generals Dibich, Chernyshev and Benkendorf, to his

right—Grand Prince Mikhail Pavlovich, Kutuzov, Governor-General of St Petersburg, and generals Levashov and Potapov, and Aide-de-Camp Adlerberg. Bludov was sitting to one side... This whole setting was intended to produce an immediate and necessary effect upon the prisoner, brought in with his eyes blindfolded. And, indeed, it produced such an effect on me! I was somewhat confused at finding myself suddenly in front of this tribunal composed of such high-ranking figures, and I stood silent, expecting to be questioned. General Chernyshev, glancing at me severely, picked up a piece of paper and said to me: "This, this and this (it was all lies) shows that you belong to the Secret Society, whose aim was to change the existing order of state government in Russia; tell us all that you know, and speak the truth!"—"I do not consider myself a member of the Southern Society," I replied, still not fully recovered from my first impressions. "It is true that, in 1820, I was a member of the Union of Welfare, but since 1820 I have not been involved, and therefore I knew very little, and even that has in part slipped my mind. If Your Excellency wishes to ask me about something I know, then I will answer quite frankly as regards myself, and remain silent only about that which concerns others, considering that to be dishonourable". "You, sir, have no sense of honour," he objected, twisting his moustache, and with that same severe look. "He who betrays his oath and rebels against the lawful authority cannot speak of honour." There was nothing to be said in reply to that. I was silent. "Do you know anything about *Russkaya Pravda*," he continued, "that product of a perverted mind?" "I know nothing," I said firmly. "You will be put in irons and forced to speak if you do not wish to confess voluntarily," he shouted angrily. At that moment the Grand Prince and the other members remained silent; some were sitting with their head bowed, others were whispering to each other. Adlerberg was noting something down with a pencil. Kutuzov was dozing but, on hearing the word "irons", rubbed his eyes and repeated: "Yes, yes, in irons". This made me so indignant that, forgetting my dependence on them, I turned to Kutuzov and said: "Your Excellency was so weary that no doubt you did not hear what General Chernyshev asked me, yet you nonetheless share his anger against me; I ask you yourself, is that just?" The Grand Prince chuckled, some of the members began to whisper more urgently to each other, General Dibich

turned to Prince Chernyshev and said heatedly: "We cannot put everyone in irons; perhaps Mr. Basargin is speaking the truth." I looked at him gratefully, Chernyshev calmed down a little and said, looking less severe: "You may go, questions will be sent to you, answer them as honestly as you can, you see with what leniency you are treated." Bludov led me out into another room, in which a number of officials were sitting and writing. One of them took charge of me and handed me over to the deputy commandant, and he led me, in exactly the same manner, back to the cell. Although the entire process of my first interrogation did not last more than one and a half hours, it nonetheless wearied me extremely, and I was even glad to return to my pitiful abode.

The following day the assistant deputy commandant brought me a sealed envelope and pen and ink. These were the questions of the Committee. They were not signed by anyone, and I was told to write the answers on the other half of the same paper, the deputy commandant did not leave my side during all the time I was writing the answers, and repeatedly urged me to hurry. When I had finished, he took the questions and answers from me. Answering without any preparation, I thought only of how to avoid injuring anyone with any ill-considered word. I was then left for a while in peace.

My life in the cell was very monotonous. The warden grew accustomed to me and even became attached to me. The guards ceased to be afraid, and not only answered my questions, but themselves entered into conversation with me. Each day the deputy commandant and his assistant came to see me while on their tour of inspection. In the evenings I could talk to my neighbour, Major Rayevsky, and thus, little by little, I adapted myself to this monotonous and melancholic life.

My cell was exceptionally damp as it was built hastily just before I was lodged in it. The walls dripped, and the darkness made it impossible for me to make any movement. Being constitutionally of poor health, I had already suffered many serious illnesses, and as I had, moreover, been subjected to violent emotional disturbance, it was not surprising that I was unable to withstand all of this. I was wracked with chest pains and coughed blood. The fortress physician gave me some powders, and prescribed half a bottle of beer with my dinner; finally he told the deputy commandant that I would not improve while in this cell, and that I should be transferred to somewhere

less damp and where I would be able to move about. As a result of this, I was taken to the other end of the curtain and placed in a cell that was larger, but so dark that, on arriving there, I was for some time unable to make out the objects inside it, until my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness...

Finally our affair came to a close. We were rarely taken to the Committee. Sometimes we were permitted to go out into the vestibule for half an hour. Shortly afterwards we were brought the usual questions for defendants: what was our age? what creed did we profess? etc. Following this we were each taken separately to sign our papers. A special Commission was appointed for this,[2] chaired by Adjutant-General Balashov. The members were: Count de Lambert, another General, and two senators who were unknown to me. General Chernyshev* was also there to deal with any explanations that might be necessary. I will describe in this connection what happened to me. This will show to what degree our judges were prejudiced. When I was taken to the Commission and given my file to look over, I noticed that it did not include the papers in which I had demanded a direct confrontation with the young Witgenstein[3] and Lieutenant-Colonel Komarov.[4] During this direct confrontation I had hoped to convince the Committee that I in no way shared the idea of introducing into Russia a republican government, and that I desired only a limitation on supreme power by means of a representative assembly. Balashov requested Chernyshev to explain to him this circumstance. The latter replied that I had indeed written and made this request of the Committee, but as I had already accepted the statements of Pestel, the Committee had not found it necessary to satisfy my request, and that this was why my paper was not included in my file. "In that case," I said, "I cannot sign my file; that paper constituted my vindication, and it is not here." "That will only be to your detriment," objected Balashov, "without your signature on the file, it will be impossible to pass judgement on you, but you will remain in the fortress; whether or not that is better, judge for yourself. In any case, it seems to me that your request can be satisfied. Sign the file and send an explanation; it will be attached to your other papers. I give you my

* Chernyshev conducted himself throughout the entire investigation with the most disgusting insolence, harshness and prejudice.—*Comment by N. V. Basargin.*

assurance on that." What else could I do? I agreed and signed, adding that my explanation was attached. When I was leaving, some official was ordered to go with me to my cell and collect the paper from me. It was indeed attached, because the report of the Supreme Criminal Court declared that three of the condemned had presented explanations, but they could not be taken into consideration. No doubt this also referred to mine.

A month passed; July came. On the 11th, after dinner, Archpriest Myslovsky went to see Bestuzhev[-Riumin.—*Comp.*] and after this the deputy commandant brought the medical attendant and asked him [Bestuzhev.—*Comp.*] if he wished to shave.* Bestuzhev agreed, and was shaved in the presence of the deputy commandant. Then he was taken for a walk in the commandant's garden. On returning from the walk, he told me all that had happened, and was surprised that he was suddenly shown such attention. "I have a feeling," he added, "that it is not without reason. Has our case perhaps come to an end, and will I be taken tonight to be incarcerated for the rest of my life? If you are released, please tell my family and friends what has happened to me. For the love of God, explain my behaviour to those about whom I was compelled to talk during the enquiry. They may think that I deliberately sought to involve them. You saw how harshly the Committee dealt with me. Now my only wish is that I should not be separated from Sergei Muravyov, and if we are doomed to live the rest of our lives in prison, then at least let it be together." His wish was fulfilled: he was not separated from Muravyov-Apostol; but it never once occurred to him that they would both face the death sentence.

On awaking in the morning of the next day, I heard a great deal of commotion in the corridor. Cells were being opened and closed. The assistants to the deputy commandant, the wardens and the guards were running first in one direction, then the other. Coming in to me, my warden indicated by gestures that Bestuzhev was being taken out, and suddenly I heard his voice. "Adieu, chers camarades! Je vais entendre ma sentence, je vous laisse un bout de papier comme souvenir."**

* He had not been shaved during all this time, and now had a beard; he was in hand irons up to his execution.—*Comment by N. V. Basargin.*

** "Goodbye, dear friends! I am going to hear my sentence, I am leaving you a piece of paper as a memento."

Our warden later gave it to me.

Not a quarter of an hour had passed before an assistant deputy commandant came into my cell and ordered me to dress to go to the Committee. Having rapidly complied, I left the cell with him, and we went to the commandant's house. My eyes were no longer blindfolded.

On entering a certain room, I found about twenty of my colleagues variously attired. Some were in full uniform, some wearing frock coats, some just in a dressing-gown. Among them were my friends and acquaintances: Wolf, Ivashov, the two Kriukovs. Some I had heard of or seen in society, others I did not know at all. In a word, here was the second category of prisoners. We were all very cheerful, greeted each other, chatted to each other, and indeed forgot what fate was awaiting us. Everyone was happy to meet, even for just a minute, after six months of solitary confinement.

Soon the deputy commandant arrived with a piece of paper and, in conformity with it, began to line us up. Having done this, he ordered us to walk in that order, one after the other, into another room, and then to move on. Having opened the doors into a third room, we suddenly found ourselves in a large chamber, with all the members of the Supreme Criminal Court in front of us, sitting on benches in two rows near a large table covered in red cloth and shaped like the letter "П". Altogether there were about one hundred.[5] In the centre stood a glass,[6] and opposite the glass sat the clergy, the metropolitans and bishops (members of the Synod), then the members of the State Council and the senators. In front of the table, on this side of the glass, stood something resembling a lectern, from behind which the steward or secretary to the Senate read out in a loud voice the sentence passed on each of us. We heard nothing at all, but only looked at each other; we were so overjoyed to see each other. I noticed that the clergy leaned forward particularly to look at us, as the glass impeded their view. On the side where I was standing, M. Speransky was sitting at the table. He knew my father and all our family. I myself was twice at his home when I was in St Petersburg. I had the impression that he glanced sadly at me, lowered his head, and a tear seemed to fall from his eyes. When the sentence was read, Nikolai Bestuzhev appeared to wish to say something, but many of those present hissed at us to be quiet, and we were hastily led out through the doors at the opposite end of the room.

I was not taken back to my former cell. On our request, the deputy commandant put me next to Ivashov in the arsenal; our third colleague was Lieutenant Zavalishin, a distant relative of Ivashov with whom I was not previously acquainted.

Ivashov and I spent the whole day as if in a daze, not thinking of the sentence at all. We could not have our fill of talking, telling each other all that had happened to us since we had parted, and we had parted about a year previously. He had left me in Tulchin, before my wife died. Lieutenant Zavalishin also communicated to us the whole story of his involvement in the Society, and in this way we talked not only throughout the whole day, but also almost the whole night.

We were still so young that our sentence of twenty years' penal servitude in the mines of Siberia did not produce any great impression on us. To speak the truth, it was so disproportionate to our guilt, represented such unjust harshness towards us, that it somehow served to exalt us even in our own eyes. On the other hand, it so separated us from the past, from our former way of life, from everything that was dear to us in life, that it necessarily called forth in each of us all our moral forces, all our spiritual resolution in order to bear this transition worthily. I am now convinced that if the government, instead of judging us so harshly, had used a gentler measure of punishment against us, it would have better achieved its purpose, and we would have been more sensible of it, even, perhaps, have regretted more that share of significance in society and the advantage of the position we were losing. By depriving us of everything, and placing us suddenly on the very lowest rung of the social ladder, it gave us the right to see ourselves as the expiatory sacrifices offered up in the name of the future transformation of Russia; in a word, out of the simplest and most ordinary people it turned us into political sufferers for our convictions, and thereby aroused general sympathy for us, while it took upon itself the role of a relentless, pitiless persecutor.

Before dawn we were ordered to make ourselves ready, and with the first ray of light we were all led out of our cells, assembled on the fortress quadrangle beside the church, and, surrounded by sentries, led out of the fortress. We presumed that the sentence was being carried out. When we arrived at a kind of meadow behind the crownwork curtain, where troops were standing under

arms, a crowd had gathered and, in the distance, some generals were riding in various directions on horseback; we found ourselves by some wooden posts with cross bars (these were the scaffolds, whose purpose none of us guessed), and those who had served with the Guards were separated and taken to the regiments in which they were listed for the execution of the sentence. All the rest, including army and artillery officers, civil servants and those retired from service, remained in their place, and the sentence against us was carried out by the chief-of-police of St Petersburg. My section included Colonel Mitkov of the Finlandsky Regiment, Pushchin, a captain in the Guards, staff captains: Nazimov and Repin; lieutenants: Rozen, Tsebrikov, Andreyev, Lappa and myself. We were taken to the Guards Brigade of the Chasseurs, under the command of General Golovin.

Once again each of us had his sentence read out to him, his sword was broken over his head, his uniform removed and immediately burned, and then he was dressed in a white gown and, at the end of this whole ceremony, taken back into the fortress. Our attire was extremely comical. There had been no time to select the gowns: one man who was rather short received the longest, and he was barely able to walk in it; another, who was tall, received a short one; the plump man was given a small size, so that he was scarcely able to squeeze into it. We could not help but smile when we looked at each other.

I was again put in the arsenal with Ivashov, but Zavalishin had been replaced by Colonel Muravyov, who had been condemned but, by the clemency of the sovereign, sentenced to live in Siberia without reduction to the ranks and loss of noble status. Entering my cell with the conviction that all my relations and accounts with the world were terminated, and that the rest of my life must pass in a remote and gloomy territory (Siberia was then not so well-known as it is now, and was spoken of with horror), in constant misery and deprivation of every kind, I considered myself already not to be an inhabitant of this world, and directed all my thoughts to bearing worthily, as far as possible, this twist of fate, to keeping my spirit high and preparing myself as best I could for my future life. As regards myself personally, I was, as it were, not dissatisfied with this twist of fate, as it seemed to bring closer the moment of my reunion with my departed wife, and enabled me not to grieve so much over her

departure. As I was of poor and ailing health, I did not expect to live very long, and my present situation was the most favourable for the hour of death. It did not allow me to regret this life, and redeemed much before the judgement of the Almighty.

Emperor Nicholas revealed in our case such bitterness against us, such an inhuman understanding of autocratic power, and at the same time such a fear of liberal ideas, of everything that had any hint of opposition to the government, that it was possible to guess in advance all his subsequent policy, the entire course of his reign. Seeing in the whole of Russia himself alone, he related everything to himself, and considered only that right, only that in accord with the advantage of Russia, which appeared advantageous for himself, that agreed with his desires and strengthened his autocracy. It is appropriate to mention also that our affair, from which he emerged the victor and which revealed to him all the servility, all the baseness of the highest government officials, inspired him with an exaggerated sense of himself, and intensified his power and self-assurance. People unconditionally devoted to the government, thinking only of their own benefit, sought to outdo each other in flattery and servility in front of him, to please him in all his autocratic whims, and exalt his every word and every action. The timid feared even to think of what had happened; finally, those on whom had fallen some suspicion of sympathy towards us* strove, by their devotion and their approval of all the measures taken by the government, to remove this misunderstanding and restore themselves in his opinion. Therefore he could never expect or meet in any of his actions either opposition or even contradiction. The word of truth was stilled, its voice silenced, and during the entire course of his thirty-year reign, he dealt not with people, but with voiceless, humiliated instruments of his absolute power. This, in my opinion, is the main reason why, in the year of trial,[7] when Russia had need of people, there appeared simple, inexperienced machines, wrecked by many years of abuse. That is why, also, unaccustomed to meeting any obstacle, he himself appeared as if at a loss, and, disillusioned in his omnipotence, was unable to endure this disillusionment...[8]

On the day that our sentence was carried out, my for-

* Their number includes Speransky, Mordvinov and, in part, Kiselyov, Yermolov and certain others.— *Comment by N. V. Basargin.*

mer guard from the crownwork curtain came to me, bringing with him some of my things that I had left there, and told me about the last moments of our five executed companions. This was an unexpected and sorely grievous communication. After they had heard the sentence, they were all placed in the crownwork curtain: Pestel in Andreyev's cell, Sergei Muravyov—in my former cell, Ryleyev—in another room, in a cell previously occupied by Bobrishchev-Pushkin, and Kakhovsky in the same room, in Rozen's cell. Archpriest Myslovsky was sent to four of them to prepare them to meet their death, and a pastor to Pestel. They were all very calm and declined to have a last meeting with their family (Ryleyev with his wife and daughter), in order not to upset their relatives and themselves. They talked a little amongst themselves, and awaited their final hour with fortitude. They were taken out early, before dawn, having been put back in irons. On coming out into the corridor, they embraced each other and went, accompanied by the priest and surrounded by guards, to the place where we had seen the posts. Here they were placed for a while in a powder store where five coffins had already been prepared, and then, when our formal reduction to the ranks had been carried out, the sentence of the Supreme Criminal Court was executed. The execution of this sentence was entrusted to General Chernyshev. Archpriest Myslovsky was with them to the last. Two of the ropes snapped,* and they fell to the ground alive. The executioners were at a loss and did not know what to do; but, on a signal from Chernyshev, they picked them up, repaired the ropes and led them up again onto the scaffold and hanged them. Then, when they had made sure that all five were no longer living, they took down the bodies and carried them to where the coffins were, and having placed the bodies in them, left them there until the following night. Then they took them out secretly at night to a cemetery for animals (called Golodai) and there, in an unknown spot, buried them...

We expected that after the reduction to the ranks we would be immediately dispatched to Siberia, and, indeed, eight men of the first category were shortly thereafter taken away. Almost all those of the first category were

* I have been unable to find out conclusively who the two were: some told me it was Pestel and Kakhovsky, while others declared it was Ryleyev and Muravyov-Apostol.—*Comment by N. V. Basargin.*

sent to different fortified posts in Finland. The others remained in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress. The sovereign, having concluded our affair, departed for his coronation in Moscow. Our relatives hoped that a general amnesty might be announced at this time, or at least a considerable reduction in our sentence.[9]

With the conclusion of our affair and the departure of the emperor from St Petersburg, surveillance over us was eased somewhat. We were taken out every day to walk around the courtyard under the supervision of the junior officer on duty. We could talk to each other without fearing to incriminate the warden or the guard. Our relatives were allowed to visit us in the commandant's house in the presence of an assistant deputy commandant, and to bring us certain things, such as: a coat, underwear, books and food. I had no relatives in St Petersburg, and so I was without the consolation of seeing them. With the departure of Colonel Muravyov, I and Ivashov were moved from the arsenal into the Nevsky curtain, where we were again put side by side. For both of us this was a great comfort. We spent the whole days talking about the past, the present and the future, tried to support each other and not allow each other to fall into depression. We read books brought to Ivashov by his family, and more than once, when our curtain was locked for the night and the guards did not fear a tour of inspection by the fortress officers, we gathered together in one of our cells. Prince Odoyevsky, a poet, very young and fiery, was lodged opposite. Of a cheerful and open disposition, he animated our conversation, and often we talked the whole night through. Thus passed two months. The sovereign returned from Moscow. To mark the coronation, our sentence of penal servitude was reduced by five years. Many were convinced that our exile in Siberia was annuled, that we would be held in prison for a year or two, that during this time the sovereign would reduce the period of penal servitude on every occasion and that, finally, he would allow us to return to the bosom of our families. However, they were calculating without knowing the character of the sovereign. In his mind he had already decided on our permanent exclusion from society, our permanent separation from our families, a menacing example for all those who might want to take the same route.

And so it proved. During his reign Siberia was populated with thousands of political exiles...

DECREE TO THE SUPREME COURT, 10 JULY 1826[1]

Having considered the report on the state criminals laid before us by the Supreme Criminal Court, we find the sentence it has handed down to be in accord with the substance of the case and the force of the law.

However, desirous of joining to the force of the law and the duty of justice the quality of mercy, we have found it good to mitigate the death sentences and punishments of these criminals by introducing the restrictions listed hereafter:

I. The criminals of the first category, condemned to death by the Supreme Criminal Court, namely: Prince Trubetskoy, colonel; Prince Obolensky, lieutenant; Borisov 2, second lieutenant; Borisov 1, second lieutenant, retired; Gorbachevsky, second lieutenant; Spiridov, major; Prince Baryatinsky, staff cavalry captain; Yakubovich, captain; Podzhio (Poggio), retired lieutenant-colonel; Artamon Muravyov, colonel; Vadkovsky, second lieutenant; Bechasnov, ensign; Davydov, retired colonel; Yushnevsky, 4th class;[2] Andreyevich 2, second lieutenant; Pushchin, collegiate assessor;[3] Pestov, second lieutenant; Arbuzov, lieutenant; Zavalishin, lieutenant; Povalo-Shveikovsky, colonel; Panov 2, lieutenant; Sutgof, lieutenant; Prince Shchepin-Rostovsky, staff captain; Divov, midshipman, and Turgenev, full state counsellor,[4] to be granted life, and sent into permanent penal servitude with loss of ranks and titles.

II. The criminals listed hereafter and belonging to the same first category, also condemned to death by the Supreme Criminal Court, to be stripped of ranks and titles, to be sent into penal servitude for twenty years and then settled in exile, namely: 1) Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, retired lieutenant-colonel, out of respect for his full and frank confession; 2) Küchelbecker, collegiate assessor, out of respect for the request of His Imperial Highness, Grand Prince Mikhail; 3) Alexander Bestuzhev, staff captain, out of respect for the fact that he himself came and surrendered to me;[5] 4) Nikita Muravyov, captain, out of respect for his total frankness and sincere confession; 5) Prince Volkonsky, major-general, out of respect for his full confession; 6) Yakushkin, retired captain, also out of respect for his full confession.[6]

III. The criminals of the second category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court—to political death by the laying of the head on the block, and to penal servitude in

perpetuity, namely: Nikolai Bestuzhev 1, lieutenant-captain, and Mikhail Bestuzhev, staff captain, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent into penal servitude in perpetuity. Tiutchev, captain; Gromnitsky, lieutenant; Kireyev, second lieutenant; Kriukov 2, lieutenant; Lunin, lieutenant-colonel; Svistunov, cornet; Kriukov 1, lieutenant; Basargin, lieutenant; Mitkov, colonel; Annenkov, lieutenant; Wolf, staff physician; Ivashov, cavalry captain; Frolov 2, second lieutenant, and Torson, lieutenant-captain, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent into penal servitude for fifteen years, and then settled in exile.

IV. The criminals of the third category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to penal servitude in perpetuity, namely: Baron Steingel, retired lieutenant-colonel, and Batenkov, lieutenant-colonel, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent into penal servitude for twenty years, and then settled in exile.

V. The criminals of the fourth category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to penal servitude for fifteen years, to be followed by settlement in exile, namely: Mukhanov, staff captain; Fonvizin, retired major-general, and Poggio, retired staff captain; Falenberg, lieutenant-colonel; Ivanov, 10th class; Mozgan, second lieutenant; Kornilovich, staff captain; Lorer, major; Avramov, colonel; Bobrishchev-Pushkin 2, lieutenant; Shimkov, ensign; Alexander Muravyov, cornet; Beliayev 1, midshipman; Beliayev 2, midshipman; Naryshkin 2, colonel, and Prince Odoyevsky, cornet, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent into penal servitude for twelve years, and then settled in exile.

VI. The criminals of the fifth category, sentenced by the Supreme Criminal Court to penal servitude for ten years, to be followed by exile, namely: Repin, staff captain, and Küchelbecker, lieutenant, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent into penal servitude for eight years, and then settled in exile; Bodisko 2, midshipman, to be sent to work as a serf, and Glebov, collegiate secretary, and Baron Rozen, lieutenant, to be sent into penal servitude for ten years, according to the sentence, and then settled in exile.

VII. The criminals of the sixth category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to penal servitude for six years, to be followed by exile, namely: Alexander Muravyov, retired colonel, out of respect for his full and frank confession, to be sent to live in Siberia without loss of

ranks and titles; Liublinsky, nobleman, to be stripped of titles and sent into penal servitude for five years, and then settled in exile.

VIII. The criminals of the seventh category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to penal servitude for four years, to be followed by exile, namely: Likharyov, second lieutenant; Yentaltsev, lieutenant-colonel; Lisovsky, lieutenant; Tizengauzen, colonel; Krivtsov, second lieutenant; Tolstoy, ensign; Count Chernyshev, cavalry captain; Ivan Avramov, lieutenant; Zagoretsky, lieutenant; Polivanov, colonel; Baron Cherkasov, lieutenant; Vygodovsky, clerk; and Von-der-Briggen, retired colonel, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent into penal servitude for two years, and then settled in exile, and Berstel, lieutenant-colonel, and Count Bulgari, lieutenant, out of respect for his youth, to be sent to work as a serf for two years.

IX. The criminals of the eighth category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to loss of ranks and titles and to exile, namely: Andreyev 2, second lieutenant; Vedenyapin 1, second lieutenant; Krasnokutsky, full state counsellor; Chizhov, lieutenant; Prince Golitsyn, page at court; Nazimov, staff captain; Bobrishchev-Pushkin 1, lieutenant; Zaikin, second lieutenant; Furman, captain; Prince Shakhovskoy, major; Focht, staff captain; Mozgalevsky, second lieutenant; Shakhirev, lieutenant, and Vranitsky, colonel, to be treated according to the sentence of the Supreme Criminal Court, and lieutenant Bodisko 1 to be reduced to a rating.

X. The criminals of the ninth category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to the loss of ranks and titles and exile in Siberia, namely: Count Konovnitsyn, second lieutenant; Orzhitsky, retired staff cavalry captain, and Kozhevnikov, second lieutenant, to be stripped of ranks and titles and sent to serve in outlying garrisons with the rank of private.

XI. The criminal of the tenth category, Pushchin 1, captain, condemned to loss of ranks and titles and to service as a conscript with right to promotion, to be treated according to the sentence of the court.

XII. The criminals of the eleventh category, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court to loss of ranks and titles and to conscript service with right to promotion, namely: Pyotr Bestuzhev, midshipman; Vedenyapin 2, ensign; Vishnevsky, lieutenant; Musin-Pushkin, lieutenant; Akulov, lieutenant; Fock, second lieutenant; and

Lappa, second lieutenant, to be treated according to the sentence of the court and posted to outlying garrisons, but lieutenant Tsebrikov, in consequence of the pernicious example which he gave by his presence in the crowd of rebels in sight of his regiment, as a man unworthy of a noble name, to be reduced to the ranks without right to promotion, and with loss of noble rank.

XIII. Finally, the fate of the criminals not here listed, who, by virtue of the heinous nature of their crime, are placed outside the categories and outside comparison with the rest, I leave them to the judgement of the Supreme Criminal Court and to that final decision which that court shall take concerning them.

The Supreme Criminal Court, in the presence of all its members, is empowered to declare to the criminals it has pronounced guilty both the sentence it has determined upon, and the clemency granted by ourself, and then to hand everything over to the appropriate authorities for due execution. The Governing Senate, for its part, will not fail to give prompt public notice both of the report of the Supreme Criminal Court and the present enactment thereupon.

Nicholas.

Tsarskoye Selo
10 July 1826

FROM THE PROTOCOL OF THE SUPREME CRIMINAL COURT OF 11 JULY 1826[1]

"On the 11th day of July, in the year 1826, the evening session of the Supreme Criminal Court heard the royal decree issued in the name of His Imperial Majesty and given to this court on the 10th day of this month of July, signed by the hand of His Majesty... Having heard this royal decree, the Supreme Criminal Court has resolved: firstly, insofar as, under article XIII of his royal decree, His Imperial Majesty had mercifully permitted that the fate of the criminals not granted clemency in the aforementioned decree and who, by virtue of the heinous nature of their crime, are placed outside the categories and outside compa-

rison with the rest, be determined by the Supreme Criminal Court and that final decision which the court shall take concerning them, therefore, in accord with royal clemency, manifest in this same case by the mitigation of the death sentences and punishments decreed for the other criminals, the Supreme Criminal Court, on the supreme authority granted to it, has resolved that Pavel Pestel, Kondratii Ryleyev, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin and Pyotr Kakhovsky, sentenced by the court to painful death by quartering, shall instead, for their heinous crimes, be hanged."

INSTRUCTION OF NICHOLAS I ON THE CEREMONIAL EXECUTION OF THE SENTENCE AGAINST DECEMBRISTS[1]

"A guard is to be mounted in the crownwork, the troops shall assemble at 3 o'clock. First, those condemned to penal servitude and degradation shall be brought out under escort and lined up facing the colours. The escort shall stand behind them, two to each. When everything is in place, the order to present arms shall be given, and the drums shall sound the first part of the signal to march. Then the general in command of the squadron and the artillery shall read out the sentence, after which the second part of the signal to march shall be played, followed by the command to shoulder arms. Then the executioners [junior officers charged with surveillance over prisoners and the execution of sentences against those convicted.—*Comp.*] shall remove the uniforms and the crosses, break the swords [over the heads of the condemned men.—*Comp.*], and throw them all onto a prepared bonfire. When the sentence has been executed, they are to be led back to the crownwork in the same manner as they were led out. Then those condemned to death shall be led up onto the ramparts, accompanied by a priest carrying a cross. The drums will then sound the signal for running the gauntlet until all has been completed, after which the troops [the escort.—*Comp.*] will wheel about to the right in sections and march past [the place of execution.—*Comp.*], and then be dismissed."

THE REPORT OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF ST PETERSBURG, P. GOLENISHCHEV-KUTUZOV, TO NICHOLAS I DATED 13 JULY 1826, ON THE EXECUTION OF THE DEATH SENTENCE AGAINST P. PESTEL, K. RYLEYEV, S. MURAVOYV-APOSTOL, M. BESTUZHEV-RIUMIN AND P. KAKHOVSKY[1]

The execution ended with the proper silence and order on the part both of the assembled troops and the spectators, who were few in number. Due to the inexperience of our executioners and their inability to construct a scaffold, at the first attempt three, namely: Ryleyev, Kakhovsky and Muravyov, fell to the ground, but were quickly hanged a second time, and met their merited end. The which I humbly report to Your Majesty.

Adjutant-General Golenishchev-Kutuzov.

13 July 1826.

"AND, HAVING ACCEPTED DEATH, THEY RECEIVED WITH IT THE MARTYR'S CROWN, WHICH CAN NEVER BE TAKEN FROM THEM."

From the Reminiscences of Yevgenii Obolensky[1]

In the meantime, the Supreme Court was concluding the case entrusted to it. We were taken to see the statements we had signed. I did not know why I was being asked; I did not know that, instead of an enquiry, the Supreme Court had already finally decided our fate;[2] I saw my statements, replied that I acknowledged them as mine. Soon came the day of 9 July.[3] We were assembled in the rooms of the commandant's house. There was great joy at this meeting with friends from whom we had for so long been separated. It was in vain, however, that I looked for Ryleyev and the other four. I vaguely realised that they had been selected from amongst us for something higher than that which awaited us. We went into the room. Familiar and unfamiliar personages were sitting in dress uniform and looking at us silently. The senior procurator[4] read out the sentence against each of us. I heard my own sentence with a strange indif-

ference. In such moments there is no time for thought; and the future that awaited us, on reaching our ears, did not represent any clear understanding of its true significance. We left, but were not taken back to the Alexeyevsky Ravelin. I was to be lodged in the crownwork curtain. I was shown a door in the long, broad corridor. I entered a small room separated from the next cell by a wooden partition. I was surprised at having such a close neighbour, having grown unaccustomed to this in the course of six months. In the evening of the next day our constant companion in conversation, our constant comforter, who, from the first day of our imprisonment, devotedly carried out his duty as a priest, as a spiritual father, as the sole friend of the prisoners, Pyotr Myslovsky, Archpriest of Kazansky Cathedral, came to see us. He called on each of us in order to prepare us as well as possible for the forthcoming execution of the sentence. Knowing his discretion as regards those things which did not come directly within his duties as a priest, I did not venture at first to ask him about the immanent fate of the five, separated from us and chosen for the supreme trial.

Finally, just before he left, I resolved to ask what was to happen to them. When he was unable to answer directly, he always answered enigmatically. His last words on that day were: Confirmation-decoration. I understood that they would be brought to trial, but that it would end in clemency. And he was convinced of it. And he hoped for it. His hopes were not fulfilled...

Midnight came. The priest, bringing the Eucharist, left Kondratii Ryleyev, left Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, left Pyotr Kakhovsky and Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin. A pastor visited Pavel Pestel.

I was not sleeping, we were ordered to dress; I heard steps, but did not understand their meaning. Some time passed, and I heard the clank of chains. A door opened on the opposite side of the corridor, the chains clanged heavily. I heard the drawn-out voice of my loyal friend, Kondratii Ryleyev: "Forgive me, forgive me, brothers!" and measured steps moved away towards the end of the corridor. I rushed to the window; it was beginning to grow light; I saw a troop of Pavlovsky Grenadiers and Lieutenant Pilman, whom I knew; I saw all five, surrounded by grenadiers with fixed bayonets. The signal was given, and they moved off. And we were told to come out. And we were escorted by those same grenadiers, and we came to the rampart in front of the fortress.

The entire Guards Regiments were assembled. In the distance I saw five scaffolds, saw the five chosen ones slowly approaching the fatal spot. I could still hear ringing in my ears the words "Confirmation-decoration", and still hope did not leave me. We were quickly dealt with: the swords were broken, the uniforms removed and thrown onto the bonfire; then, having put on gowns, we were led back by the same route into the same fortress. I was again placed in the same cell in the crownwork curtain.

The chosen victims were ready. Father Pyotr Myslovsky was with them. He went up to Kondratii Ryleyev and spoke words of exhortation. Ryleyev took his hand, laid it against his heart and said: "Do you hear, Father, it beats no more strongly than before." All five went up onto the scaffold and the execution was carried out...

Thus fell five victims, chosen from amongst us as the expiatory sacrifice for our general sin, they fell to the ground like ripe, ready fruit. But it was not the earth that received them, but the Heavenly Father, who found them worthy to enter his heavenly kingdom. They departed into eternal life, cleansed from this world in the furnace of suffering, internal and external, and, having accepted death, they received with it the martyr's crown, which can never be taken from them.

"AND THERE, IN FRONT OF AN ALTAR BEFOULED BY BLOOD-STAINED PRAYER, I SWORE TO REVENGE THE EXECUTED AND PLEDGED MYSELF TO STRUGGLE AGAINST THIS THRONE AND THIS ALTAR, THESE CANNON."

Alexander Herzen. From the Book *The Past and Reflections*[1]

Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) was an outstanding Russian revolutionary, writer, essayist and philosopher. The Decembrist Uprising of 1825 had a most powerful effect upon the formation of his views. While still a youth, he spent six years in exile for organising a revolutionary circle at Moscow University. From 1847 onwards, Herzen lived abroad as an emigre. In 1853 he founded the free Russian press in London; in 1855 he began to publish the socio-political almanac *Polar Star*, which continued the traditions of the Decembrists, and in 1857 he began publication of the newspaper *The Bell*, in which he denounced the Russian autocracy and conducted revolutionary propaganda. Herzen was the first

historian of the Decembrists: he published numerous articles on aristocrat-revolutionaries, memoirs, articles and letters by the Decembrists themselves.

...Reports about the indignation [the uprising on 14 December 1825.—*Comp.*], about the trial and the horror in Moscow amazed me powerfully; a new world was opening before me which was becoming more and more the concentration of the whole of my moral existence; I do not know how that came to be, but, understanding little, or only hazily, what the affair was about, I felt that I was not on the side of the grape-shot and victory, prison and chains. The execution of Pestel and his companions finally aroused my soul from its childhood sleep...

Nicholas' victory over the five executed men was celebrated by a service in Moscow. In the middle of the Kremlin, Metropolitan Filaret thanked God for this murder. The whole of the royal family prayed, nearby was the Senate, the ministers, and all around, over a huge area, crowded ranks of Guards bareheaded and on their knees, also prayed; cannon roared from the Kremlin walls.

Never had the scaffold been celebrated with such solemnity; Nicholas understood the importance of his victory!

A boy of fourteen, lost in the crowd, I attended the service, and there, in front of an altar befoulded by blood-stained prayer, I swore to revenge the executed and pledged myself to struggle against this throne and this altar, these cannon. I did not revenge them: the Guards and the throne, the altar and the cannon—all have remained; but thirty years later I still stand beneath the same banner, which I have never once abandoned.

"CREDIT MUST BE GIVEN TO THE GOOD RUSSIAN PEOPLE. THEY WERE CONVINCED THAT WE WERE SUFFERING FOR THEIR SAKE."

Alexander Muravyov. "On the Departure of the Condemned Decembrists into Penal Servitude". From His Reminiscences[1]

On 11 December 1826, at eleven o'clock in the evening, when the doors to the cells and the gates of the for-

tress were already closed, the deputy commandant and his assistants gathered four of the political prisoners in one of the rooms in the commandant's house: Nikita Myravyov, a captain with Main Headquarters, his brother Alexander [the author of the reminiscences.—*Comp.*], Annenkov, a lieutenant with the Horse Guards, and Torson, a lieutenant-captain with the Naval Guards. We rushed to embrace each other. A year's imprisonment in a cell had changed us beyond recognition. A few moments later the old commandant arrived and told us in a malicious voice that, on the orders of his most august sovereign, we were to be put in chains for our journey to Siberia. With a mocking look on his face, the deputy commandant brought in a bag containing the chains. My brother waited, sunk in thought, for them to be put on me. We made a noise strange to our ears as we went down the staircase in the commandant's house, accompanied by the courier and gendarmes. Each of us sat with a gendarme in a separate hooded post-wagon. We drove quickly through St Petersburg, in which each of us was leaving an unconsolable family. The Lord our Comforter gave us the strength to retain, in our tragic position, our awareness of the noble and wonderful cause in whose name we were suffering, and that peace of mind necessary in our situation. We felt neither the cold nor the jolts of the dreadful conveyance, in which we were riding for the first time in our lives, and we wore our merited chains with pride. I was young and happy to share the same fate as my noble-hearted brother. There was something poetic in my position. I was able to perceive it.

Half a verst before the staging post, the courier ordered our wagons to stop, and himself set off at full speed to the staging post, from which he shortly returned with fresh horses. The courier was acting on the orders he had been given. We suspected that our poor mother would be waiting for us at the staging post in order to say a last "goodby". And indeed, our mother, my brother's wife, Alexandrina, and her sister, Countess Sophie Chernysheva[2] were waiting for us in the house of the station-master. My mother begged the courier to allow her to embrace us one last time, offering him 500 roubles if he would agree, but she was unable to persuade him. The courier said that the fulfilment of the orders they had been given was being verified. The horses were harnessed, and we left at a gallop. It somehow happened that we drove past mother, my brother's wife and Coun-

tess Sophie Chernysheva, who shouted after us "Farewell!" This shout from our mother, a wife left alone, and her sister tore at our hearts and continued to echo for a long time in our ears. Later we learned from the gendarmes that mother, guessing that we were about to leave, had come to the fortress long before our actual departure. The commandant swore to her that we had already left but, suspecting him of lying, she had driven to the first staging post...

In order not to attract the attention of the local population, the political prisoners were sent at different times and by different routes. Our route [to the east.—*Comp.*] lay through Yaroslavl, Kostroma, Vyatka, Yekaterinburg and Omsk. No one was allowed to approach us. In chains, we covered these 6,500 versts in 24 days. The orders said we were to travel with all possible speed. We were not allowed to rest, regardless of the pitiful state of our health. We were penniless.

Credit must be given to the good Russian people. They were convinced that we were suffering for their sake. They guessed our thoughts, and, perhaps, the sweet words of freedom and the abolition of serfdom had reached them. Despite our chains, we were warmly welcomed everywhere. When the courier found it permissible, we were given food without any desire on the part of the giver to be paid by the representative of the authorities. On arriving in Tikhvin, not far from St Petersburg, the people waved us off bareheaded, despite the efforts of the courier. The same happened in Yaroslavl. In Kostroma, while the horses were being changed, a young man pushed aside our guards and burst into the room where we were, saying: "Gentlemen, have courage, you are suffering for a most wonderful, a most noble cause! Even in Siberia you will meet with sympathy!" The courier prevented him from saying any more. Noble-hearted young man! How pleasant it was to hear your words!

Separated from our parents, our friends, having lost everything that made life pleasant, in chains, suffering from cold, from the jolting wagon, and looking forward to penal servitude, we did not lose courage. Our position even inspired respect in the courier. We covered about 600 versts in the post-wagon. Then, when the snow had settled, we changed onto sledges. As we drew near to Omsk, the frost was forty degrees Reaumur. Our companion Annenkov[3] suffered more than any of us from the

cold—he had no fur coat. In Omsk a warm reindeerskin coat was bought for him.

Of all the unpleasantnesses that we suffered on our journey, the most disagreeable was the need to bear silently with the barbarous behaviour of our courier. He rained blows down on the sledge driver,[4] tried to tear his beard out. In particular, we were witnesses to the sad spectacle of such barbarities when he had to pay for each stage. True to the habits of our officials, he sought to keep for himself the money which had been given to cover the cost of the journey... The poor horses died of exhaustion. During the entire journey we rested only twice for a few hours. The first time was by reason of the serious ill health of Annenkov, the second—because my brother lost consciousness on arriving at one of the staging posts. The sledge frequently overturned, and we dragged along in the snow with chains on our legs. By sheer good fortune we were not either injured or crippled by this break-neck speed. It takes a certain degree of habit to wear chains without injuring oneself. After a while we wore them with elegance...

In the first days of January 1827, we arrived at the prison in Irkutsk. After we had been led across numerous long courtyards, we were left in a gloomy, empty and dirty room, of which the entire furnishing comprised one table and a trestle bed. The doors were bolted and guards put at the doors—we spent the whole night shivering with cold. We stayed there for many weeks, suffering from hunger. We were visited by the civil governor of Irkutsk, Zeidler, who was the first to give us news of our families, as he had already received letters from them. In great secrecy he told us that we were going to Chita, a small town on the opposite bank of Lake Baikal, 800 versts from Irkutsk...

While we were at the prison in Irkutsk, we were visited every day by the prison governor, but we felt no better for such visits; we were suffering from genuine hunger. All the events of our imprisonment fixed themselves in our memory. I will never forget the day when one of our guards sighed, causing us to enter into conversation with him. He was a veteran of the "old" Semyonovsky Regiment, condemned to army service for life for taking part in the insurrection by this marvellous regiment. He told us with tears in his eyes about our cousin, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, who was his company commander, and also about many other officers from his regiment who belonged to the Secret Society...

"THE SIGHT OF HIS CHAINS SO INFLAMED AND MOVED ME THAT I THREW MYSELF DOWN ON MY KNEES IN FRONT OF HIM AND KISSED HIS CHAINS, AND THEN HIM HIMSELF."

From the "Notes" of Maria Volkonskaya[1]

Irkutsk

On arriving in Irkutsk, the main town in Eastern Siberia, I found it to be beautiful, the locality extremely picturesque and the river* magnificent, although it was covered in ice. I immediately went into the first church which I came across in order to request and attend a service of thanksgiving; the priest who took the service subsequently proved to be the chaplain at our prison. My surprise and rapture knew no bounds when I caught sight of the clavicord which my dear Zinaida Volkonskaya[2] had ordered to be attached to the back of my sledge, unbeknown to me. This attentiveness was all the more valuable as, at the time, there was but one piano in the whole of Irkutsk, and that belonged to the governor. I sat down to play and sing, and did not feel quite so lonely. The apartment which I occupied was precisely the one from which Katasha[3] had left that very day for Zabaikalye.[4] Zeidler, the civil governor, an old German, immediately came to see me in order to exhort me to return to Russia. Such were his orders. His Majesty did not approve of young wives following their husbands: this aroused too much sympathy for the poor exiles. As they were forbidden to write to their families, it was hoped that they would soon be forgotten in Russia, whereas we, the wives, could not be forbidden to write, and thus sustain family contacts.

The governor, on seeing my determination to go, said to me: "Think about the conditions which you will have to sign."—"I will sign them without reading them."—"I should order your things to be searched, you are forbidden to have with you anything of any value." With these words he left and sent to me a whole throng of officials. They had very little to write down: a small amount of linen, three dresses, family portraits and a portable medical chest; they then opened the cases containing parcels sent by others. I told them that the arti-

* Angara river.

cles were intended for my husband; then I was presented with the notorious undertaking for signature, moreover they told me to keep a copy so that I should remember it. When they had left, my man, having read it, said to me with tears in his eyes: "Princess, what have you done? Read what they demand of you!"—"It is all the same to me, let us pack quickly and be on our way." Here is the undertaking:

1

A wife who follows her husband and continues her conjugal relationship with him thereby naturally involves herself in his fate and loses her former title, that is, thereafter she will be known purely and simply as the wife of an exiled criminal, and with this also takes it upon herself to bear all the burdens of such a condition, for even the authorities will not be in a position to defend her against the offensive behaviour she may hourly encounter from the most degenerate and despised class, who will consider that they have the right to view as one like themselves the wife of a state criminal enduring the same fate as themselves; such offensive behaviour may even assume violent forms. Inveterate malefactors do not fear punishment.

2

Children who will be born in Siberia will be classified as state factory serfs.[5]

3

It is forbidden to take either money or valuables; this is prohibited by existing regulations, and is necessary for personal safety, as these places are inhabited by people capable of any crime.

4

On leaving for the Nerchinsk district, the right to ownership of any accompanying serfs is annulled.

Having gathered together the things which the officials had left in confusion, and having ordered everything to be packed anew, I remembered that I would need a travel permit allowing me to change horses. After I had signed the undertaking, the governor ceased favouring me with his visits, and I had to wait for him in the corridor. I went up to him, and I was given a travel permit in the name of the Cossack who was to accompany me...

I crossed Lake Baikal at night in a bitter frost: tears froze in my eyes, and my breath seemed to turn to ice...

The Blagodatsky Mine[6]

This proved to be a village consisting of one road and surrounded by hills with the mine workings carried out to obtain lead which contained silver ore. The locality was beautiful, except that the forest had been felled 50 versts all around lest runaway prisoners seek to hide there; even bushes had been chopped down; in winter the view was depressing.

The prison stood at the foot of a high hill; it had formerly served as a barrack, and was cramped, dirty and repulsive. Three soldiers and a junior officer constituted the internal guard; they never changed. Later 12 Cossacks were assigned to the junior officer to mount guard outside. The prison comprised two rooms divided by a large, cold entrance hall. One of the rooms was occupied by runaway prisoners who had been recaptured; they were kept in chains. The other room was for our state criminals; just inside the door were the soldiers and the junior officer, who smoked evil-smelling tobacco and paid no regard whatsoever to the cleanliness of the room. Along the walls of the room were kennels or cages made out of planks and intended for the prisoners; one had to go up two steps in order to enter them. The one allotted to Sergei was only three arshins long and two across; it was so low that it was impossible to stand upright; he occupied it together with Trubetskoy and Obolensky. Obolensky, for whom there was no room to put in a bed, ordered planks to be secured over Trubetskoy's bed. Thus these sections were like little prisons within the walls of the prison itself. Burnashev[7] suggested that I go in. For a moment I was unable to see anything as it was very dark; a little door to the left was opened, and I went up into my husband's section. Sergei rushed to me; the

clanging of his chains surprised me: I had not known that he was in chains. The harshness of this incarceration made me realise how much he suffered. The sight of his chains so inflamed and moved me that I threw myself down on my knees in front of him and kissed his chains, and then him himself. Burnashev, who was standing at the door unable to enter because of lack of room, was amazed at this outpouring of my respect and admiration for my husband, whom he addressed in the familiar "thou" and treated as a criminal.

Indeed, even if one were to view the convictions of the Decembrists as madness and political folly, nonetheless justice demands recognition of the fact that he who sacrifices his life for his convictions cannot but merit the respect of his compatriots. He who is prepared to go to the block for his beliefs truly loves his homeland although, perhaps, he has begun his undertaking prematurely...

According to the prison regulations, the prisoners went to work every day, except Sunday, from 5 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock; the set quota of work was three *poods** of ore per man.

It is worth pointing out here to what degree our government is mistaken with regard to our good Russian people. In Irkutsk I was warned that I ran the risk of offensive behaviour, even of being killed in the mines, and that the authorities would not be in a position to protect me, as these unfortunates fear no greater punishment. Now I was living among these people, who belong to the lowest order of humanity, and, on the contrary, we saw on their part only signs of respect; more than that, Katasha and myself they simply adored, and they referred to our prisoners as "our princes", "our gentlemen", and when they were working together in the mines, they offered to do their quota of work for them; they brought them hot potatoes baked in ash. These unfortunates, on finishing their sentence, having endured the punishment for their crimes, were, for the most part, reformed and began to work for themselves, became good fathers, and even entered trade. Few such honest people would be found amongst those coming out of gaols in France or England.

The day after my arrival at Blagodatsk, I rose at dawn and went into the village, enquiring about the place where my husband worked. I saw a door which appeared

* *Pood*—old measure of weight equal to 16,381 kg.

to open into a cellar leading underground, and next to it stood an armed guard. I was told that it was here that our prisoners went down into the mine; I asked if it was possible to see them at their work; the kind-hearted soldier hurried to give me a light, something resembling a torch, and, accompanied by another soldier, an officer, I resolved to go down into this dark labyrinth. It was quite warm, but difficult to breathe in the close air; I walked quickly and heard a voice behind me calling loudly to me to stop. I realised that it was the officer, who did not wish to let me speak with the prisoners. I put out the torch and ran ahead, as I could see bright spots in the distance; it was the prisoners, working on a slightly raised piece of ground. They lowered a ladder for me, and I climbed up it, it was drawn up again, and thus I was able to see my husband's companions, give them news from Russia and the letters I had brought with me. My husband was not there, nor Obolensky, or Yakubovich or Trubetskoy; I saw Davydov, both Borisovs and Artamon Muravyov. They were among the first eight sent from Russia, and the only ones to come to the Nerchinsk factories. Meanwhile the officer down below was losing his patience and continued to call to me; finally I went down; from that time onwards it was strictly prohibited to let us enter the mine. Artamon Muravyov called the incident my "descent into hell"...

My Arrival and Stay in Chita[8]

We bought two carts, one for ourselves and one for our things, and departed. It was with great pleasure that I passed again along that road, now framed with forest and wonderful flowers...

At last we arrived in Chita, very tired, and stayed with Alexandrina Muravyova. Naryshkina and Yentaltseva[9] had only recently arrived from Russia. I was immediately shown the prison or fortified camp, already filled with prisoners; there were three prison buildings resembling barracks and enclosed within stockades as high as masts. One of the prisons was quite large, the other two were very small. Alexandrina lived opposite one of the latter, in the house of a Cossack, who had constructed a large window out of an aperture in the side of the attic. Alexandrina took me there and showed me the prisoners, pointing to them by name as they came out into their vege-

table garden. Some had a pipe, some a spade, others a book. I did not recognise any of them; they seemed calm, even cheerful, and were dressed very neatly. Their number included some very young men who looked to be only 18 or 20 years old, such as, for example, Frolov and the Beliayev brothers.[10]

Our prisoners were going out to work, but as there were no mines in the area—so badly informed is our government on the topography of Russia that it supposes there are mines everywhere in Siberia—the commandant had thought up other work for them to do: he obliged them to clean the prison cattlesheds and stables, which had long since been left untended, like the Augean stables of mythology. This had been their work in winter, long before our arrival, and when summer came they were set to work sweeping the streets. My husband and his companions, together with their invariable fellow-travellers, arrived two days after we did. When the streets had been put in order, the commandant thought up a hand-operated mill for their labour: the prisoners were to grind a set quantity of flour each day; this work, used as a punishment in monasteries, fully corresponded to the monastic style of their lives. Thus did the majority spend fifteen years of their youth in incarceration, although their sentence had condemned them to exile and penal labour, not to imprisonment.

I had to find lodgings for myself. Naryshkina was already living with Alexandrina. I invited Yentaltseva to come and live with me, and together with Katasha we occupied one room in the house of a deacon; the room was divided by a partition, and Yentaltseva took the small part for herself alone. This wonderful woman had already passed her fourty-fourth birthday; she was intelligent, had read everything written in Russian, and her conversation was agreeable. She was devoted heart and soul to her rather sombre husband, a former artillery colonel. Katasha was undemanding and easily satisfied, although she had grown up in St Petersburg, in the magnificent home of Lavalle, where the floors were laid out in marble flags that had once belonged to Nero and had been acquired by her mother while in Rome—but she loved society conversation, had a keen and sensitive mind, and was gentle and agreeable in character.

Having mentioned my women friends, I should mention that I was most deeply attached to Alexandrina Muravyova; she had a passionate heart, and her every

action revealed a noble spirit; filled with admiration for her husband, she adored him and wished us to do the same. Nikita Muravyov was a cold, serious man—a man made for the study and not for action; while full of respect for him, we, however, could not share her enthusiasm. Naryshkina was small and very plump, a little affected, but essentially a very worthy woman; one needed to accustom oneself to her proud air, and then it was impossible not to love her. Fonvizina[11] arrived shortly after we had settled in our lodgings; she had a completely Russian face, white, fresh-complexioned, with prominent blue eyes; she was small, rather plump, and of very poor health... On returning to Russia, she lost her husband, and at the age of 53 years was married a second time, to Pushchin, the godfather of my son.

Annenkova came to us, still with the name Mlle. Paul. She was a young French woman, beautiful, aged thirty; she was bursting with life and good spirits, and had an amazing ability to find the humorous side in others. As soon as she arrived, the commandant told her that he had received instructions from His Majesty regarding her wedding. As the law required, the chains were removed from Annenkov when he was taken to the church, but on his return they were put back on again. The other women accompanied Mademoiselle Paul to the church; she did not understand Russian, and continually exchanged jokes with the two attendants to the groom, Svistunov[12] and Alexander Muravyov. This seemingly carefree attitude concealed a strong attachment to Annenkov which had compelled her to renounce her native land and independent life. When she had requested His Majesty for permission to go to Siberia, he was in the portico. As he got into the carriage he asked her: "Are you married?"—"No, Sire, but I wish to share the fate of the exile." She remained a devoted wife and loving mother, working from morning to evening yet retaining her elegance of attire and her usual manner of speech...

In Chita life became more bearable; the women saw each other during their walks in the surrounding countryside; the men were once again united with old friends. In the prison everything was held in common: belongings, books; but it was very cramped: there was no more than one arshin between the beds; the clang of chains, the noise of conversation and singing was unbearable for those whose health had begun to weaken. The prison was dark, the windows set just beneath the roof, as in the

stables. In summer the prisoners spent their time outside; each of them had a little allotment which he tended in the large prison yard, but in winter it was intolerable. In Chita they numbered seventy three men...

On 1st August 1829, we received an important piece of news: the courier brought instructions to remove the chains from the prisoners. We had grown so accustomed to the sound of the chains that I even felt a certain pleasure on hearing it: when I met Sergei it warned me of his approach.

In the early days of our exile I thought that it would probably end in five years, then I told myself that it would end in ten years, then in fifteen years, but after 25 years I stopped waiting. I asked God for just one thing—that He would bring my children out of Siberia.

In Chita I received the news of the death of my poor Nikolai, my first-born, whom I had left in St Petersburg.

A year later I heard about the death of my father. I was so far from expecting this, and the shock was so great, that I felt as if the world had collapsed on me; I fell ill, the commandant allowed Wolf,[13] the doctor and a friend of my husband, to visit me, accompanied by a convoy of soldiers and officers.

At that time there was a rumour that the commandant was building a large prison with windowless cubicles 600 versts away; this news troubled us considerably. I have forgotten to mention something that troubled us even more: a year previously, prisoners condemned to penal servitude had passed through Chita; with them were three of our exiles; Sukhinov, Baron Solovyov and Mozgalevsky. All three had belonged to the Chernigovsky Regiment and were colleagues of the late Sergei Muravyov; they made the whole journey to Siberia on foot together with ordinary criminals. They informed us of their arrival; my husband told me to go and see them, help them and encourage them to be patient. The camp at which the prisoners had stopped was situated just further on beyond our village, three versts from my lodgings. I awoke Katasha and Yentaltseva at dawn, and we set off, on foot, naturally, in dreadful cold; having made a long detour in order to avoid the sentries, we reached the camp. When we drew near to the wall, these gentlemen were already standing there, waiting for us; it was still quite dark. Sukhinov was in such an emotional state that he did not even wish to listen to us; he talked only

of the need to bring the prisoners at Nerchinsk out in revolt, return to Chita and set free the state prisoners. Solovyov, a man of very calm character and extremely patient, told me that this was merely a temporary condition, and that he would grow calmer. At last I left, sad and anxious. Unfortunately my fears proved true. Sukhinov, on arriving at the Nerchinsk factory,[14] became wary of his colleagues, began to avoid them, and fell into the hands of the local prisoners; they armed themselves with whatever they could, and, numbering about 200, retreated towards the Chinese border... They were all seized by Cossacks guarding the border, and locked up. A courier was dispatched to His Majesty and returned with orders that they all be tried within 24 hours, and the ringleaders shot. Our commandant set off for the mines and carried out his instructions to the letter. Sukhinov learned of the sentence on the eve of its execution, and when they went into his prison, they found him dead: he had hanged himself from a beam supporting the ceiling, and the belt with which he held up his chains had served as the rope. The rest of the condemned were led outside the village, and all twenty of them were put to death, but in what a manner! The soldiers were ordered to fire, but their rifles were old and rusty, and they themselves, unable to shoot accurately, either missed, or else fired into the arm or leg; in short—it was torture. The following day the commandant ordered the dead to be buried, and when all had left, he bowed down before each grave, asking forgiveness. We learned all these details from Solovyov and Mozgalevsky, who were transferred to our place. This news cast us into a depression. The commandant returned in very sombre and disturbed spirits: he foresaw only escapes and fires, and hastened to complete the construction of the Petrovsky prison...

The Petrovsky prison was finished; the commandant ordered the prisoners to make ready to leave. This move was made on foot in the month of August (1830); we covered up to 30 versts on one day, and rested the next... Alexandrina and two of the other ladies had gone on ahead. Naryshkina, Fonvizina and myself followed on behind a few hours later. When we were 6 versts from the town of Verkhneudinsk, we made a halt. Near this town Baroness Rozen[15] met her husband. She was an excellent woman, rather methodical. She remained with us in Petrovsk for only one year, and then left with her husband to live in exile in Tobolsk Gubernia. At that time

Yushnevskaya arrived.[16] Already in middle age, she had taken six months to make the journey from Moscow, halting everywhere and finding acquaintances in every town; social evenings and boat trips were arranged in her honour; finally, having learned that Baroness Rozen was already in Verkhneudinsk, she hired a mail wagon, drove past our caravan with the speed of lightning and came to a halt at the peasant cabin where her husband was waiting for her. She was 44 years old; completely grey, she had retained the cheerfulness of her youth.

We set off once more. At the last staging post before Petrovsk, we met the commandant. It was here that we learned of the July revolution.[17] All through the night, songs and shouts of "hurrah!" could be heard among our men; the sentries could not understand it: how were they able to amuse themselves with song as they approached the prison? In fact, these people understood nothing about politics.

Petrovsky Zavod[18]

As we drove up to Petrovsk, I saw an enormous prison shaped like a horseshoe and with a red roof. It had a gloomy appearance: not one window looked outwards; so we had not been deceived when we were told that the prison was without windows... The most unbearable thing about the prison was the absence of windows. A torch burned all day in our cell, which was tiring for the eyes. Each of the women arranged her cell as best she could: in our cell I covered the walls with a silk material (which had once been my curtains and had been sent from St Petersburg), I had a piano, a bookcase with books, two small divans—in a word, quite smart. We all wrote to Count Benkendorf, asking him to permit windows to be put in the cells; the permission was granted, but our old commandant, more timorous than ever, thought of placing them high up, immediately beneath the ceiling. We were already living in our lodgings when this permission came. Our prisoners constructed window seats out of planks so as to be able to read.

Our women's circle was enlarged with the arrival of Camilla le Dantu,[19] who was engaged to Ivashov; she was the daughter of a governess who lived at the Ivashov home; her fiance had known her as an adolescent. She was a delightful creature in every respect, and marrying

her was a great good fortune for Ivashov. The wedding took place in less gloomy circumstances than that of Annenkova: there were no more leg irons, the groom made a ceremonial entrance with his attendants (although accompanied by unarmed soldiers). I was the couple's godmother;[20] all our ladies accompanied them to the church. We drank tea with the young couple, and the following day we dined with them. In short, we were beginning little by little to return to a normal life...

Outside the hours appointed for labour, the prisoners spent their time engaged in study, in reading and drawing. N. Bestuzhev made a collection of portraits of our companions; he occupied himself with mechanics, made watches and rings; soon each of us was wearing a ring made from the iron of her husband's chains. Torson made model windmills and threshing machines; others took up joinery, sent us work tables and tea caddies. Prince Odoyevsky wrote poetry; he wrote beautiful verse... Poor Odoyevsky, on finishing his term of penal servitude, left to settle not far from the town of Irkutsk; then his father succeeded, as a favour, in obtaining his transfer to the Caucasus as a private, and there he died not long afterwards, during an expedition against the Circassians.[21]

The cell gradually emptied; the prisoners were taken away as their sentences came to an end, and were scattered over the vastness of Siberia. This life without one's family, without one's friends, without any society, was more difficult than their original imprisonment.

Finally our turn also came. Wolf, Nikita and Alexander Muravyov and ourselves left one after the other so as not to find ourselves without horses at the staging posts. My husband had requested in advance to be settled with Wolf, a doctor and his old army friend; I valued this greatly, hoping to avail myself of the advice of this wonderful physician for my children; we were not in the least concerned as to the place which fate would choose for us. The Lord was kind to us, and made it possible for us to settle not far from Irkutsk, the capital of Eastern Siberia, in Urik, a rather depressing village, but with a bearable climate, for me all was well if only I had medical aid for the children should it be necessary.

Mikhail Lunin, an old friend of my husband, was also settled in the same village. Unable to find for ourselves a suitable peasant cabin—all the best ones were already occupied by other exiles from our number—we went to Poggio,[22] a relative of mine by marriage, who was living

9 versts away and who had been sent there earlier from the Schliesselburg Fortress; he welcomed us with open arms, and was all the happier to see us as he had spent eight and a half years in solitary confinement in that dreadful fortress. During all those years he had seen only his gaoler and, very rarely, the commandant. He was left in total ignorance of what was happening outside the walls of the prison, he was never allowed to go outside and, when he asked the sentry: "What day is it today?" he was told: "I don't know." Thus he had not heard of the Polish uprising, the July revolution, the wars with Persia, with Turkey, nor yet even of the cholera epidemic;[23] his sentry died of cholera at the door of the cell, and he suspected nothing of it. The dampness in his cell was such that all his clothes absorbed it, his tobacco was covered with mould; his health suffered to such an extent that he lost his teeth. However, he, at least, spent only eight years in confinement, whereas poor Batenkov spent more than twenty years in the fortress, seeing no one, not even the commandant. He lost the ability to speak and, in order not to lose his sanity, he read and reread the Bible, setting himself the task of translating it mentally into various languages: first into Russian, the next year into French, then into Latin. On his release he proved totally incapable of speech: it was impossible to tell what he wanted to say; even his letters were unintelligible. The ability to express himself slowly returned. In all of this he retained his calm and cheerful spirit and inexhaustible kindness; add to this the strength of will for which he is known, and you will appreciate the worth of this remarkable man...

Lunin led a solitary life; a keen huntsman, he spent his time in the forest, and only in winter did he live a more settled life. He wrote and amused himself by mocking the government in his letters to his sister. Finally he made some remarks about the sentence passed on those who took part in the Polish revolution.[24] This was discovered, and one day, at midnight, his house was surrounded by twelve gendarmes, and several officials went in to arrest him; finding him sound asleep after returning from the hunt, they did not hesitate to wake him up, but were taken aback at the sight of several rifles and pistols hanging on the walls; one of them expressed his fear; then Lunin, turning to the gendarme standing beside him, said: "Have no fear, such people are beaten, but not killed." The following incident was yet another example of his wit. During

his initial imprisonment in a fortress in Finland, Zakrevsky, the Governor-General, visiting the prison as part of his duties, asked him: "Do you have all you need?" The prison was dreadful: rain dripped through the ceiling, so bad was the roof. Lunin replied with a smile: "I am perfectly content with everything, all I need is an umbrella."

Lunin was taken away by the whole of this military guard, armed against one man, and incarcerated in Akatui, the worst prison of all, in which are held hardened criminals convicted of murder and robbery. He was soon unable to withstand the infected and damp atmosphere in this, his last imprisonment, and died there four years later. He was a man of resolute will and remarkable intellect, always cheerful, infinitely kind and of deep faith. His transfer saddened us greatly. I took him some books, nourishing chocolate for his ailing chest and, disguised as medicine, some powdered ink together with several steel pens, as everything had been taken from him and he had been strictly forbidden to write, or to read anything except the Bible.

"MY LAST WISH IN THE WASTES OF SIBERIA IS THAT MY THOUGHTS, TO THE DEGREE THAT THEY CONTAIN ANY TRUTH, SHOULD SPREAD AND DEVELOP IN THE MINDS OF MY COMPATRIOTS."

The Letters of Mikhail Lunin to His Sister, Yekaterina Uvarova (1838-1839)[1]

The letters which Mikhail Lunin wrote while in exile resembled, in terms of their content, political pamphlets on the most topical issues of public life in Russia. They formed part of the programme which Lunin referred to as "offensive actions" against the government. The letters to his sister, while personal in form, were intended to be read by a wide public and were passed around in copies. In his final letter, addressed not to his sister but to an "unknown lady", Lunin wrote: "My letters serve to express those convictions which led me to loss of status, imprisonment and exile... The publicity which my letters have acquired through numerous copies has turned them into a political tool which I must use in defence of freedom."

No. 6, Siberia, 7 April, Easter 1838.

Dear Sister,

The pleasure which your letters always give was clouded by the news of what has happened to Colonel D. A

difficult situation; but you are taking it too much to heart. An attack by a bandit does not bring with it dishonour. It is not in the power of men to shame us when we have not merited it. I stood beneath the scaffold and wore chains. But what of it? Was that to my shame? My political opponents are not of that opinion. They were obliged to use force because they had no other means of refuting my ideas for the improvement of public life. As regards Colonel D., he may now win new lustre for his directness and honour by requesting clemency for the murderer, or by providing him with the means of subsistence if he is condemned by the law.

In exchange for these mundane perturbations, I am able to tell you some good news. My hours are spent in the peace of my study, or in contemplation of the beauties of the Siberian forests. How surprising is the measured pace of happiness. The nearer I draw to the destination of my voyage, the more I am blessed with following winds. There is nothing to worry about if clouds again gather on the horizon. This storm will pass as all the others have, and will only quicken my entry into harbour.

No. 7, Siberia, 16 June 1838

My Dear Sister,

My nickname changed during my imprisonment and exile, and with each change it became longer. Now, in official documents, I am referred to as: "A state criminal in exile." A whole sentence accompanying my name. In England they would say: Lunin—a member of the opposition. For such, indeed, is the essence of my political significance. I took no part in the revolts typical of the mob, nor in the conspiracies appropriate to slaves. My sole weapon is my thought, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in disagreement with government policy, depending on the responses it receives. In the second case there is nothing to fear. Opposition is typical of any political system. And the present order in Russia has its own opposition; but it expresses itself in trips abroad or residence in Moscow, and is composed of people who have revealed their lack of ability, or who have embezzled while in service. I hope that you will not confuse me with these gentlemen, and will not pay any regard to what may be said, written or published about me. Al-

though I do not seek the high opinion of society, I nonetheless hold yours in esteem because of our relationship. Farewell.

Your loving (brother).

No. 16, Siberia, September 1838

My Dear Sister,

The Ministry of Public Education believes in autocracy as in a dogma and, possessing powerful means, uses them to strengthen it. It never ceases to preach that this mode of government would in every age be the dominant idea of the people, and that it is the only route to salvation in the present and the sole guarantee for the future. Hired writers compose books in support of this proposition, while the police upholds it with its applause. However, another language is needed, and other proofs, and most of all, another government in order to oblige 50 million people [in Russia.—*Comp.*] to accept the principles which are advantageous to us. For the people do think, despite their profound silence. The proof that they think are the millions spent with the purpose of eavesdropping on opinions whose expression is then prevented.

The first thing that comes to mind is the need to verify whether the statements made by the Ministry correspond to the past. When granting the Poles a constitution, Emperor Alexander promised before the whole of Europe to spread the blessings of a representative form of government to all the peoples entrusted to his care by Providence. This priceless hope of the Russians was given the significance of a moral assurance following the Manifesto of 12 December 1826.[2] Filled with feelings of gratitude to their generous monarchs, the Russians waited with total confidence for the fulfilment of this double promise.

But now the Ministry of Education tells them that there is no longer anything to wait for, that the present arrangement is sufficient, and that to desire another is a crime; moreover it does not even indicate by what act [this] behest of the sovereign has been annulled. When events speak so loudly, there is no need to explain them. By what right does the Ministry, ascribing to itself legislative power, rob the people of their dearest hopes? If the Poles have abused the benevolence of their tsars, is this a reason for subjecting the Russians to one and the

same punishment? Finally, does it think that, by inspiring in the people mistrust of the tsar's word, it will incline it to support autocracy? However, the Ministry is right when it rejects a representative form of government, for the voice of the exile, now lost in the wastes of Siberia, would then ring out from the tribune to reveal it as guilty of exceeding the limits of its authority—when it interferes in religious affairs; in the destruction of the fruits of its own efforts—when it renders rising generations incapable of enjoying the benefits which the government prepares for them; in the preaching of Russian nationalism in a language that is not even Russian. Farewell.

1839, August 17, Irkutsk

The political content of the letters from Siberia has attracted the attention of the government. The Governor-General has passed on to me the order to write nothing more for a year. This prohibition on the expression of my opinions is evidence of their significance, and of the timidity which people generally feel on first seeing the truth until they recognise it and love it. Such a prohibition in politics usually has an unfortunate effect on the authorities from which it comes, giving rise to the idea that there is insufficient evidence to support the ideas being expressed. The purpose of my letters was to indicate the organic issues of public life which require solution, but which are concealed and pushed aside by occupying people's minds with secondary and trivial details.

My undertaking is not without its usefulness in an age of transition, when the spontaneity of a rational opposition does not exist, when the press, mute for the truth, serves solely as the expression of mechanical flattery. The cloud of praise which surrounds the government has the deceptive effect of fantastic spectres. Incarcerated in prison cells, I have not ceased for ten years to ponder upon what is best for my country. My thoughts have always inclined to the benefit of those who were unaware of my intentions. In exile, as soon as circumstances changed, I once again began my offensive actions. Many of my letters, which are transmitted via the Imperial Chancellory, are already being read.

The last wish of Themistocles[3] in exile was that his mortal remains be taken back to his homeland and inter-

red in his native soil; my last wish in the wastes of Siberia is that my thoughts, to the degree that they contain any truth, should spread and develop in the minds of my compatriots.

No. 1. Exile. 15-27 September 1839

Dear Sister!

The termination of my correspondence, so harmful in its consequences for your domestic affairs, obliges me to explain the reasons for my behaviour, which snapped the last visible link between us. I was obliged to refer to important issues when I spoke of your lawsuits over your inheritance and about the emancipation of your serfs. In the first case I was fulfilling my duty to you; in the second—to humanity. Despite the frankness of my speech, I always sought to observe the rigorous rules of good manners and always eagerly availed myself of any opportunity which allowed me, by inner conviction, to pay the tribute of my respect to the actions of the authorities. My praise, insignificant in itself, has, however, a certain value if one recalls that it alone, maybe, is disinterested.

Let me be shown the law which prohibits the expression of political ideas in a letter to a relative. It does not exist in our Code [of laws]. Nor will it be found in any legislation, as politics is contained within the depths of all moral, scientific and literary questions, and such a law would be the equivalent of a prohibition on thought.

We are all capable of error. One may be mistaken without self-interest, both in prison and in high posts in public life. Let us refer to events. I indicated that the slowness of success in the Caucasus[4] flows from people of the old type; as soon as fresh people were found in the ranks of the army, we immediately moved ahead. I analysed the instructions of the Ministry of Public Education at the end of last year;[5] at the beginning of the present year, Vladimir University was closed, and a few months later Derpt University was subjected to prohibitive measures. I said a few words about the Ministry of State Properties,[6] which has already ... etc., etc. The anticipation of such events could not happen by accident; it would seem more probable that the ideas which I set out in my letters contained something of the truth. But I am not seeking to vindicate myself. On the contrary, I

would like to express my deep regret that my frankness, which had as its aim only your benefit, subjected me to the disapproval of the authorities, for whom I have profound respect.

Your loving Mikhail

"I, THE UNDERSIGNED, HAVING THE FIRM DESIRE TO SHARE THE FATE OF MY HUSBAND, A STATE CRIMINAL..."

From the Reminiscences of Pauline Annenkova[1]

Praskovya Annenkova (1800-1876), the wife of the Decembrist Ivan Annenkov (1802-1878), nee Pauline Goeble, French by birth, and the daughter of a general who served under Napoleon. She was born in Nancy. In 1823 she concluded a contract with Dumancy, the owner of a fashion emporium in Moscow, and moved to Russia. Here, in 1825, fate brought her into acquaintance with Ivan Annenkov, a lieutenant in the Cavalierguards Regiment. Following the trial of Annenkov, she obtained permission to follow him into Siberia. She wrote her reminiscences of the life of the Decembrists in Siberia.

I left Irkutsk on 29 February 1828, rather late in the evening, in order to cross Lake Baikal at dawn. The Governor had warned me in advance that before my departure all my things would be examined and, when he then learned that I had a gun with me, he advised me to hide it. However, far more important was the fact that I had with me quite a large amount of money, about which, of course, I said nothing. Then I had the idea of sewing the money inside black taffeta and hiding it in my hair, which was much assisted by the hairstyles then in fashion. My watch and chain I placed behind the icon, so that when the three officials, all wearing crosses, appeared to examine my things, they found nothing.

Lake Baikal is approached along the banks of the Angara. This river is remarkable for its unusually rapid current, thanks to which it does not freeze all winter, or at least until January. Near to Irkutsk, the Angara is very broad, but at the place where it flows out of Lake Baikal it follows a narrow course between two steep banks. All of this was so new to me, so unusual, that I completely forgot all the inconveniences of my winter journey, and

waited impatiently to catch sight of Lake Baikal, that sacred sea, which finally opened up before us to provide an extraordinarily majestic picture, despite the fact that everything was covered with ice and snow. I must admit that I did not feel completely calm about crossing this mountain lake as I had been told that very broad cracks often formed in the ice, and, although the horses were trained to jump across them and the sledge drivers took planks with them, nonetheless such journeys were fraught with considerable danger. Fortunately for me, we did not come across a single crack, and we crossed Lake Baikal with unbelievable speed...

From Verkhneudinsk to Chita is a distance of 700 versts, I had difficulty in making progress, even on my light sledges, as there was very little snow, and we were travelling literally over frozen ground. Eastern Siberia never has deep snows, whereas a great deal of snow falls in Western Siberia. When I made the journey, there was almost no habitation along the whole route from Verkhneudinsk to Chita. I came across only three villages, the rest of the staging posts consisting of Buryat *yurtas** and the staging post itself... In places where there was no snow at all and the horses were unable to pull the sledges, which were laden with a large variety of items, Buryats appeared and helped us with the horses, unwilling to take anything for their services...

Finally Chita appeared. Chita stands on a hill, so I saw it from a distance, and, moreover, the Buryat with whom I was travelling pointed it out to me as soon as it became visible. They are a quick-witted people; they had already noticed our ladies, who travelled here one after the other. Chita is now (1861) an uyezd centre. Then it was a small village consisting of just eighteen houses. There had been an old stockade here in which the Decembrists were initially placed. We crossed a small stream and entered a street, at the end of which stood this stockade. Not far from the stockade was a house with a balcony, and on the balcony stood a woman. On seeing my sledge, she began to gesture to me to stop, and insisted that I call on her, saying that the lodgings which had been prepared for me were some distance away, and that it might be very cold there. I accepted the invitation, and thus it was that I made the acquaintance of Alexandrina Muravyova.

* *Yurta*—a cone-shaped tent, often made of felt, used by the Siberian nomads.

She was an exceptionally dear woman, young, beautiful, pleasant, but extremely irritable. Fiery by nature, sensitive, she took everything far too much to heart, found it hard to bear the position she and the others were in, and she was soon in her grave, leaving behind her the fondest memories.

I hastened to arrive in Chita by 5 March, Ivan's [Annenkov] birthday, and hoped that I would see him as soon as I arrived. I had even taken special care with my toilette at the last staging post, but Muravyova disappointed my hopes, explaining that it was not as easy to see the prisoners as I had thought...

Here is the undertaking which the ladies gave on arriving in Chita:

"I, the undersigned, having the firm desire to share the fate of my husband, state criminal N, condemned by the Supreme Criminal Court, and to live in that factory, mining or other settlement where he will be held, if this is permitted by the commandant of the Nerchinsk mines, Major-General Leparsky, undertake in all conscience to observe the articles written below and put before me by the same commandant; any failure to do so, or smallest deviation from these regulations will render me liable in law. The articles of my undertaking are as follows:

"1. Desiring to share (as set forth above) the fate of my husband, a state criminal, and to live in that settlement where he will be held, I shall not seek any meeting with him by any means, nor by any methods other than with the permission of the commandant, and only on the appointed days, which will not be more than one day in every three.

"2. I shall not deliver to him (my husband) any articles, money, papers, ink or pencils without the knowledge of the commandant or of the officer charged with surveillance of my husband.

"3. I shall not, in whatever manner, write to anyone nor dispatch to any destination my letters, notes or other papers except through the commandant. Likewise, if any letters or other items, listed in point 3, are sent to me or my husband through relatives or other persons, I shall, upon receiving them, declare them to the commandant unless they have been delivered to me through him.

"4. I undertake to do the same as regards any articles of any kind sent to myself or my husband, or any money.

"5. Of the belongings I have brought with me, and of

which a register is possessed by the commandant, I shall not sell, give or destroy any without his knowledge. As regards my own money, left me for my present needs, and also any delivered to me in the future by the commandant, I undertake to keep an accounts-book of income and expenditure, and to record in it my expenses, keeping this book intact; should the commandant require to see it, it is to be presented to him immediately. If any items are found over and above those recorded in the register kept by the commandant and which have been concealed by me, I shall be liable in law for this violation.

"6. Likewise I shall never send to my husband any intoxicating drinks, such as: vodka, wine, bear, honey, excepting victuals; and these are to be conveyed to him through the senior NCO on duty, and not through my servants, who are forbidden to have any personal contacts with my husband.

"7. I undertake not to meet with my husband except in the prison building, in the place indicated and at the appointed time, in the presence of the officer on duty; not to say to him anything that is not necessary or not suitable [i.e. relating to the reasons for exile.—*Comp.*], and in general to conduct with him only the permitted conversation and to speak solely in Russian.

"8. I shall not hire any other servants or workers, but satisfy myself with the services of the one man and one woman assigned to me, for whom I also assume the responsibility of ensuring that they have no contacts with my husband, and also responsibility for their behaviour in general.

"9. Finally, having assumed such an obligation, I myself shall not depart from the place appointed for me to reside in, nor send my servants to any other place at my own discretion, without the permission of the commandant or, in his absence, that of the senior officer.

"To the precise fulfilment of the above, I hereby set my signature. Chita stockade, 1828..."

At last the day of our wedding was decided upon, which was 4 April 1828... Preparations began in the morning. All the ladies sought to array themselves as well as they could in Chita, where, however, it was impossible to obtain anything, even sufficient candles to illuminate the church as befitted such a ceremony. Then Yelizaveta Naryshkina used the wax candles which she had brought with her, and the lighting proved very fine. The groom's attendants were determined to wear white ties,

which I made for them out of lawn handkerchieves, and I even starched their collars as befitted such an occasion. No one, of course, had a carriage... Our cheerful mood evaporated, the jokes died away, when the groom and his two companions, Pyotr Svistunov and Alexander Muravyov, who were to be his attendants, were brought wearing chains. The chains were removed in the church porch. The ceremony did not last long, the priest hurried and there were no choristers. At the end of the ceremony, all three, that is, the groom and his two attendants, were put back in chains and returned to the stockade. All the ladies accompanied me home. My lodgings were very small, its whole furniture consisting of a few chairs and a trunk, on which we managed to seat ourselves.

After a while, the assistant to the deputy commandant, Rozenberg, brought Ivan, but for no more than half an hour. It was only on the day following our wedding ... that he was brought for two hours, and that was a great favour on the part of the commandant. During almost all of our stay in Chita, the prisoners were not allowed out of the stockade, and to begin with our husbands were brought to us only if one of us was seriously ill, and even this required the special permission of the commandant. We, on the other hand, had the right to enter the stockade to pay a visit every third day. There was a small room specially for this purpose, where our husbands were brought, accompanied by the officer on duty...

Princess Trubetskaya and Princess Volkonskaya were the first of the wives to arrive in Siberia, and therefore they suffered more deprivation and sorrow than the rest. They prepared the way for us, and displayed so much courage that one can only stand amazed. They found their husbands in the Nerchinsk mine, where they had been sent, together with seven of their companions, before the coronation of Emperor Nicholas. They were under Burnashev, the head of the Nerchinsk mines. Burnashev was a vulgar and even a cruel man who oppressed the prisoners in every way possible, taking harshness to the point of injustice, and he refused totally to allow the wives to see their husbands. In Nerchinsk, as in Chita, the men were taken out to work, but in Nerchinsk everything was done differently due to the influence of Burnashev: the prisoners were always surrounded on all sides by soldiers, so that their wives could only see them from a distance. Prince Trubetskoy picked flowers along the way, made a bouquet out of them and left it on the

ground, but his unhappy wife could only approach to pick up the bouquet when the soldiers could not see her.

Furthermore, these two wonderful women, formerly pampered by life, having had a sheltered upbringing, were subjected to every kind of deprivation and heroically bore them all. At one time Princess Trubetskaya had brown bread and *kvass** as her only food. Thus they passed a whole year at Nerchinsk, and were then transferred to Chita.

"DURING THE WHOLE OF OUR EXILE THEY WERE EVER OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS."

Nikolai Lorer about the Wives of the Decembrists. From His Reminiscences[1]

...With reverence and deep respect do I recall their names. These worthy women fulfilled their duty of conjugal loyalty with heroic self-sacrifice. For the most part young, beautiful, women of society, they freely chose to renounce the delights of society, left their fathers, mothers, and travelled many thousand versts to spend their days in the snows of Siberia beside their unfortunate husbands. At first, in St Petersburg, many encountered serious difficulties in carrying out their noble intentions, but finally the government, seeing their inflexible will, permitted them to undertake this voluntary exile, but on what onerous conditions! To begin with, they were insulted with the suggestion that they remarry, then they were not given permission to take their children, born before their husbands had been sent to Siberia; they were forbidden to sent back to Russia any children who might be born to them in Siberia; they were not allowed to take their servants with them, and finally they were obliged to assume responsibility for the future actions of their husbands.

Alexandrina Muravyova, born Countess Chernysheva and the granddaughter of a fieldmarshal...,[2] on hearing the conditions before her departure to Siberia to join her husband, allowed the officials to read only as far as the paragraph concerning the children, tore the pen from his hand and signed the conditions with the words: "Enough!

* *Kvass*—a fermented drink of black bread, sugar and yeast.

I am going!" What a strong character! Great, indeed, was your love, noble woman, for your husband.

...Yekaterina Trubetskaya was the first to follow her husband, and set out in winter from St Petersburg in a mail-wagon...

Princess Maria Volkonskaya, born Rayevskaya, the daughter of a famous and courageous hero of 1812, a defender of Smolensk, said farewell to her only child, leaving him in the care of her mother-in-law, the elderly Volkonskaya, mother of Sergei Volkonsky, and also soon followed her husband.

Yelizaveta Naryshkina, the daughter of Pyotr Konovnitsyn, was a fraulein at the court of the Empress Maria Fyodorovna, and had been married only a year. On learning of the fate of her husband, she immediately requested as a favour from the Empress, her patroness, a letter permitting her to follow her husband, was given the letter, and carried her cross to the end.

Alexandra Davydova, the wife of Vasilii Davydov, was a woman distinguished by her intelligence and angelic heart. Previously she had lived in her village of Kamenka,[3] where Pushkin had also spent his days when he was exiled, and he had felt respect and tender affection for the entire family. Pushkin wrote many of his stories in Kamenka, under the name of Belkin. At the time of his arrest, Vasilii [Davydov] was a retired colonel. His wife, following the sentence, left the refuge where she had spent her youth, left her parents and relatives, and even her children, and followed her husband.

Natalya Fonvizina, born Apukhtina, is one of the most wonderful women of her time. Her blue eyes reflected such depths of spiritual life that a man with a troubled conscience could not look directly into such eyes... In her tender years she had, in winter and barefoot, left her parents' house in order to devote herself to the service of God, and wished to become a nun, but it pleased the Almighty to point another road to eternal salvation. She married General Fonvizin and went with him to Siberia, sharing his labours and his exile, and leaving two sons behind in Russia. In 1812-1823, Alexei Yermolov[4] had two adjutants—Fonvizin and Grabbe. The latter is now an adjutant-general and enjoys an excellent reputation, while the first, when he returned from Siberia after 20 years of exile, Yermolov immediately visited in Moscow. Such attention is sufficient to indicate the character of Fonvizin.

Madame Annenkova, a French lady from Paris... Here is her story. The young and handsome Annenkov, who was then serving with the Cavalierguards, met and became acquainted with her in Moscow. Having fallen head over heels in love with her, as the expression goes, Annenkov wanted to marry her, but his mother, out of Moscow punctiliousness and aristocratic pride, forbade the marriage, and the young people loved each other in secret. While the young Annenkov was imprisoned, his beloved was unable to see him, not having the legal right to do so, and suffered unbearably, living almost in poverty. Finally she learned that Annenkov had been taken away. What was she to do? Whom could she turn to? The sovereign was then leaving for Novgorod. Without pausing long to think, the French girl stopped the monarch on the road and asked for his permission to follow Annenkov. "Vous êtes sa femme?" [You are his wife?—*Comp.*] asked the sovereign. "Sire! Je suis mère!" [Sire! I am an expecting mother!], said the poor woman in confusion. The sovereign thought for a moment, and ordered her to appear before him in Novgorod, which the poor woman did.[5]

The temporary court was surrounded by a crowd of the curious and, when she attempted to enter, the gendarmes at the portico would not let her pass, but Lobanov-Rostovsky,[6] who fortunately happened to come out at that moment, realised what the matter was, extricated her from her difficulties and, offering her his arm, led her to the sovereign in his study... The clemency of the sovereign enabled this unfortunate stranger to attain her noble purpose.

On arriving in Siberia, she was married to Annenkov, and the commandant, on the wish of the sovereign, was her godfather.

Baroness Rozen, born Malinovskaya, also left her tiny son in the care of her sister and followed her husband to Siberia. Not having many resources, what deprivations this poor woman suffered! Her journey of 6,000 versts she made without any servants, post-chaise, and achieved her goal. In Siberia she bore four sons, herself weaned them and, having brought them through infancy, herself brought them up and provided them with an intellectual and spiritual education. Later, having become excellent artillery officers, her sons showed that the care of their worthy mother had not been in vain.

Finally we were joined by a young and pretty fiancee, and this is how it happened. General Ivashov had a son in

the Cavalierguards Regiment. This young man was soon transferred to the 2nd Army as adjutant to Count Witgenstein. Having received a brilliant secular education, enjoying the considerable wealth of his father, and gifted by nature with a fine appearance and a talent for music, lessons in which he took from the famous Field,[7] the young Ivashov could have hoped for a happy future, but his youth carried him away, he became a member of the Southern Society, and was arrested and sent to serve 15 years in penal servitude. His father's estate was in Nizhni Novgorod Gubernia, on the banks of the wonderful river Volga, surrounded by large gardens, and all that with funs and amusements of the nobility. Once, the Ivashov family were spending the summer on their estate, and the young Ivashov availed himself of his leave to enjoy country life in the circle of his family. Living with them was the old governess of Ivashov's sisters, Madame Dantu, with her attractive 18-year old niece. It comes as no surprise to learn that the young people drew together and fell in love, and Ivashov began to pay serious court to his sisters' friend...

Then came the year 1825; Ivashov was arrested and taken to the SS Peter and Paul Fortress. It is not difficult to imagine the despair of the whole family, and in particular the grief of the young Mademoiselle Dantu, concealed for the sake of propriety. Her delicate health gave way before this shock, and she had to take to her bed. Old Madame Dantu finally obliged her niece to tell the truth. Having admitted her attachment to the young Ivashov, Mademoiselle Dantu requested to be allowed to share his exile.

Half a year passed. Then, one clear day, we were at work when two peasants came riding up to our group to inform M. Volkonskaya that a Mademoiselle Dantu had arrived at the last staging post in a coach. Leparsky brought Ivashov to Volkonskaya's to await her arrival, and we attempted to improve the appearance of our young companion-groom: we somehow cleaned his black frock coat, powdered his hair, embraced him and sent him out. We saw a coach draw up to the house, and a slender woman step out and then throw her arms around the neck of her beloved; [he was.—*Comp.*] without his chains, which Leparsky had ordered to be removed to mark this solemn event. She was carried in unconscious, but happiness and fervour are never fatal. Soon she recovered, and was married in the church. Leparsky, wear-

ing his medal, was, with imperial consent, their godfather, and two friends of the exile were the groom's attendants. A supper was given at Volkonskaya's, and all our ladies joyfully accepted this new and happy couple into their circle.

Madame Yantaltseva, not having the monetary resources to follow her husband, invited Yelizaveta Naryshkina to join her, and they came to Siberia together. Colonel Yantaltsev had been the commander of the light horse-drawn artillery battery of the 2nd Army, and had been accepted into the Southern Society by Pestel. He died in exile.

Having described our ladies, I will finish by saying that during the whole of our exile they were ever our guardian angels, and when, to begin with, we were ourselves not allowed to write, they undertook our correspondence, dividing it among themselves, and communicating every month with those dear to us in Russia. Gradually they bought themselves houses, created homes, and formed a small, unanimous colony near our stockade...

"SHE WAS THE FIRST VICTIM SNATCHED BY IMPLACABLE FATE FROM OUR MIDST."

The Death of Alexandra Muravyova. From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Lorer[1]

...A short while before this [1832.—*Comp.*], our little society was struck by the death of our general benefactress, A. Muravyova. She was the first victim snatched by implacable fate from our midst... This gentle, sensitive woman, during the whole of the time she spent fulfilling her wifely duties, was in a constant state of anxiety over her husband, his brother, and her children left behind in Russia. Her frail body succumbed, and ... despite the care of [doctor.—*Comp.*] Wolf, after 20 days of suffering this strong-willed woman died.

Feeling that death was near, she asked for the priest, and when he began to speak a little loudly, she asked him to speak more quietly so as not to waken the baby,[2] which she was already too weak to cradle...

In her last minutes she asked Trubetskaya to write down her desire to be buried beside her father, in the family vault, and signed her will with a firm hand...

A few minutes later, holding the hands of her husband and his brother in her own, which were growing cold, she closed her eyes with the words: "Good God, how wonderful it is there!" and left us forever...

The death of this virtuous woman struck us all, and none of us closed our eyes during that tragic night, but wandered from corner to corner as if in a fog...

[Nikolai.—*Comp.*] Bestuzhev, that fine man, took care of the coffin, covered it with white taffeta and, on the wishes of her husband, who hoped that permission would be granted to transfer the body to Russia, even set off to the factory, with the consent of the commandant, and there cast a coffin out of lead with his own hands.

Meanwhile the assistant to the deputy commandant had woken the ordinary convicts and requested them to thaw out the soil (in Siberia in November this is essential) and dig a grave, promising them good pay. The workmen called out with one voice: "We won't take anything, she was a mother to us, she fed us, clothed us ... and now we are orphans. We will go without pay!" The commandant allowed them to pay their last respects one by one in the church, and when I came to the funeral service, I recall that her husband and his brother were standing at the head of the coffin, and the first was so laid low by grief that during those few days his hair had rapidly turned grey. Alexandra was lying in her coffin with the same angelic smile which had greeted us every day. Our ladies, dressed in black (they wore no other colour), surrounded the coffin of their late and worthy friend. We carried her mortal remains to the Petrovsky cemetery, two versts from the stockade. When the sad procession drew level with the house of Leparsky, he came out and bowed low in sincere respect for our common benefactress. At the grave, the wooden coffin was placed inside the lead one and lowered into the frozen earth... Her dying wish was not fulfilled... From St Petersburg came a refusal—and the body of this virtuous woman rests to this day in the snows of Siberia...

Shortly thereafter Bestuzhev made first a model, and then set up a memorial in stone, which stands even now at Petrovsky Zavod. Beneath this memorial are also buried two of her children. Nikita Muravyov departed this life in exile, in the village of Urik in Irkutsk Gubernia, and thus having lived all his life with his wife, was parted from her only by death... And that only bodily. Their souls no doubt soar high in the skies. At the end he

remained with one daughter, whom her mother had called Nonushka. The poor orphan was taken by relatives in St Petersburg, and the government sent her to the Yekaterininsky Institute under the name of Nikitina.[3]

"THESE WERE REMARKABLE PEOPLE, UNIQUE IN BOTH THEIR MORAL QUALITIES AND THEIR CHARACTER."

Reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin about His Companions in Exile[1]

...I shall say a few words about ourselves, that is, about those of our Siberian exiles who, as a result of the Manifesto [26 August 1856.—*Comp.*] either returned to Russia or stayed to live out their lives in Siberia. Four years have passed since that Manifesto was issued. Only 25 were still alive, and these were more or less tired old men. Over the last four years, many of these have moved on into eternity... Some of those who have died were remarkable people, unique in both their moral qualities and their character, and I do not feel it would be out of place for me to describe those among them whom I knew best.

Ivan Yakushkin was among those who are raised above the ordinary by their intellect, education and character. The distinguishing feature of his character was a resolute, inflexible will as regards everything which he saw as his duty and was a part of his conviction. Devoted in spirit to all that was noble and elevated, he was to some extent an idealist, ready to sacrifice himself for the good of his neighbour, and all the more so for the good of society. He never thought of himself, was not concerned about his own tranquillity, nor his material well-being. In the latter he even went as far as eccentricity.

Possessing only limited resources, he gave these to help his fellows, and during the whole of his life in Siberia was unable to acquire even a fur coat. In Yalutorovsk,[2] although he had no resources, he had the idea of opening a school for the poor class of boys and girls, and it was only thanks to his persistence, his energy and, one might say, his superhuman efforts that he achieved his purpose. In order to do so, he was obliged, over a period of 10 years, to struggle not only against necessity, but against external obstacles. The government strictly prohibited

any of us from having any influence on the education of the young. The local authorities were charged with ensuring this, and it was impossible to conceal from them his involvement. Reports, enquiries and intrigues began on the part of ill-wishers from among the local officials, who saw us as people who rejected that order with which was inseparably bound up their benefit and importance. All this had to be borne with and somehow smoothed over. To the credit of the higher gubernia authorities it must be said that in this case they were on the side of a beneficial cause, and although they clearly could not defend that which involved us, they furthered Yakushkin's plans and approved his noble aim. Soon the beneficient consequences of the school he had opened began to reveal themselves. The simple people were happy to send their children to attend it, and they received, in addition to needlework and elementary education, also the rudiments of moral education. Yakushkin spent whole days with the pupils, taught them himself, supervised the teachers and guided them. Often he even helped the poor out of his own meagre purse, and never hesitated to ask those who had the means to contribute to the needs of the school. Enjoying general esteem, he used this to acquire wherever he could the material resources for the establishment he had founded. His example influenced the higher local authorities. In Tobolsk and Omsk they introduced similar girls' educational establishments which, by virtue of their considerable resources, developed even further. The Yalutorovsk school, despite its lack of funds, not only continued to exist during the whole of our stay in Siberia, but continues even now under the local educational authorities. One may say without hesitation that public education for girls of the lower classes of the population in Tobolsk Gubernia is deeply indebted to Ivan Yakushkin.

In his personal relations he was distinguished by his wonderful straightforwardness and was as trusting as a child. He was very often deceived, but did not even complain about this; he warmly defended the good side of human nature, not paying the least attention to the bad side, always spoke up on behalf of those who had infringed some moral law, ascribing this not so much to corruption as to human weakness.

There was but one thing that he could never pardon, and in this he was implacable. That was—extortion. In his eyes, nothing could excuse a bribe-taker. Of course, in

this case he sometimes contradicted both himself and his leniency towards other human flaws. Yet it is precisely this which proves that his judgements were not the fruit of ill-considered thoughts accepted without conviction. To this must be added that he loved heated debates, and was always ready to speak on behalf of those who were not in a position, or were not able to defend themselves. He also had his faults, but they only served to make his merits more manifest. He was extremely systematic, and in this respect he could be stubborn. On arriving in Yalutorovsk, he moved into a miserable apartment and lived there for 20 years precisely because everyone advised him to change, and he wanted to show that it is possible to live in any dwelling. More than once he fell ill as a result of these conditions, but would never admit the real cause, and did not like it if he was reminded of it. He also had the idea that it would be healthy to bathe in very cold water—he thought of trying this out on himself, and set off every day for the Tobol, even in November, when the temperature was 5 or 6 degrees below freezing. Sometimes he would come out of the water blue with cold, shivering, and would assert that it was extraordinarily agreeable and beneficial. However, having once caught cold and suffered from a fever, he was obliged to abandon this pleasure, although he did not admit that the cause of his illness was his autumnal bathing.

He returned to Russia to be with his sons, but lived only a few months. The main reason for his death was the lack of interest and inexcusable indifference shown by the local Moscow authorities. He moved to Moscow, where his son was then serving,[3] in the winter of 1854, hoping to rest there after the long journey and recover.

Another companion of mine in Yalutorovsk, [Ivan.—*Comp.*] Pushchin, who died in Russia in 1859, was beloved by all of us, and not only by us, that is, by his friends and acquaintances, but by all those who knew him, however slightly. There are few people who have as much to speak in their favour as Pushchin had. His open character, readiness to be of service and to be useful, his straightforwardness, honesty and total selflessness placed him on a high level morally, while his handsome appearance, particularly agreeable manner of discourse, capacity for apt but innocent humour, and his fine education attracted all those who knew him and who had the opportunity to converse with him in the intimate circle of

his friends. The offspring of an aristocratic family (his father was an admiral), and having himself, on graduating from the Lyceum, joined the Guards Artillery, where a successful career awaited him, he left his service and transferred to public service, where he was appointed a court judge in Moscow. I still remember how amazed everyone was at this transfer, and how he was criticised for it, because in those days public service, and particularly in the lower instances, was considered beneath rich and noble gentlemen. However, his aim was to show by his own example that one may serve one's country well and honourably in any place, and thus raise the level, so to speak, of unimportant posts, on which the fate of the lower classes increasingly depends. It should be pointed out that at this time he was already a member of a [secret.—*Comp.*] society and, consequently, believed that by doing this he was fulfilling his duty as a useful member in terms of its aims.

In Chita and Petrovsk, where he was together with the rest of us, he constantly sought to ensure that none of his companions was in need. The money which his family sent to him he handed over almost entirely to the group, and himself lived modestly, was almost always in debt, which he hastened to pay as soon as money arrived, sometimes remaining without a penny and lacking even essentials. This selflessness, or perhaps it would be better to say, indifference to money, went to extremes and often placed him in a difficult position, but he always contrived to extricate himself without harm to his reputation, and without violating the rules of rigorous honesty...

I will also say a few words about Mikhail Küchelbecker,[4] who died in 1858 in Siberia. He was notable for incredible kindness and originality. Having served with excellence in the navy, in the Guards Crew, he was known to be a competent and efficient officer. In 1825, shortly after returning from a voyage round the world, he was arrested in December on the square where he had gone with the rest of his companions and a part of his Guards Naval Crew. After being condemned, he returned, on the day the sentence was read, to his cell, thinking not about himself but about the others. He had a batman who had served him well and whom he loved dearly. Foreseeing his unenviable future should he have to return to the Crew and enter active service, Küchelbecker had the idea of writing to Grand Prince Mikhail on the subject, and requested his protection for the batman. This

request was rather unusual, as he had been condemned precisely because he had prevented the Grand Prince from approaching and speaking to the troops who had come out onto the square, and had even threatened that he would be obliged to shoot at him.

To the honour of the Grand Prince, it must be added here that he complied with the request and took the batman into his service. In Chita and Petrovsk he entertained us all with stories about his travels, and if one of us was ill, he always took upon himself the duties of a sister of mercy.

On leaving Petrovsk in 1832 to live in exile in Barguzin, beyond Lake Baikal, he soon married and remained there permanently, because his large family and meagre means did not permit him to think of returning to Russia. There he was beloved by everyone and, despite his own material needs, was able to help those who were without and to share all he had...

"ALL THE SUFFERINGS THAT THEY HAD EXPERIENCED IN LIFE LEFT THEM MARKED NOT BY BITTERNESS, NOT BY HATRED OF MANKIND, BUT BY BOUNDLESS HUMANITY, EXCEPTIONAL BENEVOLENCE AND MODESTY."

Nikolai Belogolovy. From "Reminiscences of a Siberian about the Decembrists"[1]

Nikolai Belogolovy (1834-1895) was a physician, a prominent public figure, a poet, writer and essayist, a friend of such well-known Russian writers and public figures as Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Nekrasov and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and the organiser and leader of a circle of enlightenment in Siberia in the 1860's. In his youth Nikolai Belogolovy was intimately acquainted with many of the exiled Decembrists and left valuable reminiscences about them.

...In the time I am writing about, that is, in the 1840's, the Irkutsk Decembrists already enjoyed considerable freedom; the majority of them lived in the surrounding villages, had the right to come into town from time to time, and soon many of them settled in Irkutsk, at least during the winter months, and the first example of this, as I recall, was given by the Volkonskys. Apart from the Razvodnaya colony to which I have already referred

[a colony of Decembrists living in the village of Malaya Razvodnaya, near to Irkutsk.—*Comp.*], the following Decembrists were also living in the environs of Irkutsk: Trubetskoy, Volkonsky, Nikita and Alexander Muravyov, the two Poggio brothers, Sutgof, Mukhanov, Panov, Doctor Wolf, Bechasnov... The Volkonskys lived in the village of Urik, 17 versts from Irkutsk, where they had their own large house and considerable farmland, which the elderly Volkonsky worked enthusiastically. Nikita and Alexander Muravyov, Nikolai Panov and Doctor Ferdinand Wolf also lived in Urik. By that time Nikita Muravyov was already a widower, having buried his devoted wife, whom all the Decembrists adored as their guardian angel; this love they then transferred onto her daughter, Sofia, whom everyone called Nonushka. In the middle of the 40's, Nonushka was taken to be brought up in Moscow, I did not meet her in Urik, and it was only on remembering how frequently and with what tenderness the old Decembrists had spoken of her that I later, a student in Moscow, took the opportunity to meet her, and found her extraordinarily pleasant. By then she was already married to Bibikov. She died in Moscow in 1892. Shortly thereafter Nikita Muravyov himself died in Urik. The other brother, Alexander Muravyov, married the governess of the Volkonsky children, and at the end of the 40's was granted permission to enter public service... and served in Tobolsk, reaching the rank of counsellor to the gubernia government. Doctor Wolf also died in the first half of the 40's, and therefore I do not remember him, but he was long remembered in Irkutsk society as a highly experienced and humane doctor; faith in him was such that, twenty years later, my Irkutsk patients showed me prescriptions already faded with age and preserved reverently as sacred relics which had once saved them from death. Finally, the Poggio brothers and Mukhanov took up their abode 7 versts from Urik, in a remote village... and Bechasnov lived alone... 12 versts from Irkutsk.

The two main centres around which the Irkutsk Decembrists gathered were the Trubetskoy and the Volkonsky families, as they had the means that allowed them to live at greater ease, and also as both housewives—Trubetskaya and Volkonskaya—by virtue of their intelligence and education, and Trubetskaya by virtue of her extraordinary warmth, were as if created to unite all these companions in one friendly colony, while the presence of children in both families added still further animation

and warmth to the relations. One can only regret that such noble and spiritually integral examples of Russian womanhood as were furnished by the wives of the Decembrists have still not found their true appreciation, their Plutarch, for if the revolutionary activity of their Decembrist husbands, because of the time we are living through, makes it impossible for us to treat them quite objectively and with historical impartiality, no one can prevent us from seeing in their wives such classic illustrations of devoted love, self-sacrifice and extraordinary energy that the country which produced them may justly take pride in them, and who, without any lapse of time and independently of any political tendentiousness could serve in women's education in many respects as ideal examples for future generations. How can one not feel awed respect and not bow down before these young and frail women who, having grown up with every comfort and care in the atmosphere of metropolitan high society, left, often contrary to the advice of their fathers and mothers, all the glitter and wealth that surrounded them, broke with the whole of their past, with the ties of family and friends, and threw themselves, as if into an abyss, into remote Siberia in order to find their unfortunate husbands in penal mines and share with them their fate, the total deprivation and lack of rights that is the lot of exiled convicts, burying in the Siberian tundra their youth and beauty. In order to appreciate more fully this tremendous exploit by Trubetskaya, Volkonskaya, Muravyova, Naryshkina, Yentaltseva, Yushnevskaya, Fonvizina, Annenkova, Ivashova and the others, one must remember that all of this happened in the 20's, when Siberia was seen from afar as a gloomy, ice-covered hell, from whence, as if from the next world, there was no return...

I was more closely acquainted with the Volkonsky family, and therefore I can say more about them. The family then consisted of the husband, the wife, a son already in his youth, and a daughter. The elderly Volkonsky—he was already around sixty—was reputed in Irkutsk to be very eccentric. Having arrived in Siberia, he managed to break abruptly his connections with his brilliant and aristocratic past, became a meticulous and practical farmer and, as the expression now is, returned to the land. Although he remained on friendly terms with his companions, he rarely frequented them, but associated more with the peasants; in the summer he would disap-

pear for days at a time, working in the fields, and in winter his favourite pastime was to visit the town market, where he would meet many of his acquaintances from among the local peasantry, with whom he liked to chat about their needs and farming matters. The town-dwellers who knew him were not a little shocked when, on a Sunday, going to the market after the morning service, they saw the Prince perched at the front of a peasant cart loaded with sacks of grain and conducting a lively conversation with the peasants gathered around him, breakfasting with them on a hunk of brown bread. When the family came to live in the town and moved into a large, two-storeyed house in which, later, the governors always resided, the old Prince, preferring life in the village, spent his time in Urik, and only occasionally came out to see his family, but even then—to such a degree did the genteel luxury of the house not accord with his tastes and inclinations—he did not stay in the house, but set aside a room for himself somewhere in the courtyard, and this, his own dwelling, resembled a storeroom, cluttered as it was with various lumber and all kinds of farm implements; nor could it boast of especial cleanliness because, yet again, the Prince's visitors were mainly peasants, and the floor always revealed traces of dirty boots. He often appeared in his wife's drawing-room stained with tar, or with wisps of hay on his clothes and in his bushy beard, and exuding the perfumes of the cattle-shed or other such aromas not associated with the salon. He was, all in all, a highly original phenomenon in society, although he was well-educated, spoke French like a Frenchman, with a pronounced guttural 'r', was very kind and, with us children, always pleasant and affectionate... I will here describe my last meeting with him, a few years after the amnesty, in 1861 or 1862. I was then a physician and living in Moscow, where I was taking my doctorate examinations; one day I received a note from Volkonsky with the request that I visit him. I found him, although white as snow, nonetheless still full of life, animated and, moreover, so dressed and so dandified that I had never seen him in Irkutsk; with his long, silver hair carefully combed, his equally silver beard trimmed and clearly cared-for, and his whole face with its delicate features criss-crossed with deep wrinkles, he was so much the image of an elegant, fine-looking old man that it was impossible to pass him by without admiring his biblical beauty. The return to Russia following the amnesty, his

sojourn abroad, his meetings with surviving relatives and friends of his youth, and that reverential respect with which he was greeted everywhere for the trials he had suffered—all this seemed somehow to transform him, so that the declining years of this troubled life was unusually clear and attractive. He became far more talkative, and immediately began a lively account of his impressions and encounters, particularly abroad; political issues once again concerned him, and his passion for the land seemed to have been left behind in Siberia, along with everything that went with the status of an exile...

However, if [in Irkutsk.—*Comp.*] Volkonsky, absorbed in his farming pursuits and wholly assimilated into the peasantry, felt no attraction to urban life, and was far more interested in the country, his wife, Princess Maria, loved cultured society, entertainment, and was able to turn her house into the focal point of social life in Irkutsk...

...The very fact that the Volkonskys kept open house led directly to close association and softened manners and tastes. Furthermore, however the other Decembrists sought to stay in the background and to retain their modest position of exiles, the simultaneous appearance of 15 or 20 highly-educated individuals in the small and diverse society of this town of twenty thousand inhabitants could not but leave a deep mark. Some of them, as, for example, Nikolai Bestuzhev, Nikita Muravyov, Yushnevsky and Lunin, exerted their irresistible effect by virtue of their brilliant minds, while the majority did so by virtue of their broad and well-grounded education, which they had supplemented during their isolated yet intimate life in Chita and Petrovsky Zavod. Their true enlightenment precluded any parade of their origins or superior education, but, on the contrary, they sought sincerely to draw close to the provincial milieu which surrounded them and to introduce into it the light of their knowledge; all the sufferings that they had experienced in life left them marked not by bitterness, not by hatred of mankind, but by boundless humanity, exceptional benevolence and modesty... It was natural, therefore, that they soon won general affection and respect in Irkutsk, and their beneficient influence on their surrounding milieu was profound, although, perhaps, difficult to identify, because it operated slowly and unobtrusively, not by loud phrases and striking deeds, but by intelligent conversation, always warmed

with humane inclinations, and by the personal example of irreproachable honesty in every aspect of their daily lives, visible to all. Each of them individually, and all of them together were such living examples of culture that they naturally raised the significance and worth of culture in the eyes of everyone who came into contact with them, and especially those who felt a vague awareness of something better in life than the mindless vegetation and self-degradation which then distinguished life in the provincial backwaters. There can be no doubt that very many of the Irkutsk officials and merchants, as a consequence of experiencing directly the charm of enlightenment, felt a greater need for the spiritual delights of life, began to read more, and in particular began to concern themselves with providing their children, as far as they could, with a full education. It is no coincidence that it is from this time, that is, the end of the 40's, which is considered in Russia to be the most stagnant and barren period in the history of Russian enlightenment in the 19th century, that there can be detected in Irkutsk society the first strivings among the young to enter the universities in Russia, strivings which, having then received their first impetus, thereafter continued to grow and develop.

"THE PETROVSKY PRISON WAS FOR MANY PRISONERS A UNIVERSITY."

Pyotr Pershin (Karaksarsky) about Mikhail and Nikolai Bestuzhev in Exile in Siberia. From His Reminiscences[1]

Pyotr Pershin (pseudonym Karaksarsky) was an essayist and a prominent representative of progressive Siberian society at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. In his youth he was friendly with exiled Decembrists living beyond Lake Baikal, and he left invaluable reminiscences about them.

This account relates to the beginning of the 1860's, when the Decembrists were already leaving the Petrovsky prison, from where the Bestuzhev brothers, Nikolai and Mikhail, and Karl Torson went to live in the town of Selenginsk. There they settled on the banks of the river Selenga, three versts south of the town of Selenginsk, surrounded by cliffs, as if they had selected the most strategic point for defence. And indeed, they could be

reached only by one narrow road cut out of the rock.

The Bestuzhev house stood alone, with outbuildings, constructed of pine logs, and consisting of five or six rooms furnished with the essentials. The house was adorned by the presence of the hospitable Maria, wife of Mikhail Bestuzhev, nee Selivanova, the sister of a local officer. In the same house there also lived Maria's unmarried sister, Natalya. Their joy and consolation was Mikhail Bestuzhev's little son, Kolya, a four-year old boy named in memory of Nikolai.

At the Bestuzhev home gathered the most animated society of local residents and officers from the battery quartered there and the headquarters of the 3rd Cossack Brigade. The hosts did not allow boredom to afflict their guests, and everyone felt perfectly at home.

Mikhail was an engaging conversationalist, able to talk endlessly about prison life, into which he had been able to introduce diversity. The Petrovsky prison was for many prisoners a university where those whom service and the social round had not given sufficient leisure time were able to supplement their education. Doctors, engineers, artillery officers—each according to his speciality—delivered lectures. No one missed these lectures, and the auditorium was full for each lecturer. The books and journals which were received in every European language left no time for boredom. Although each book had to go to commandant Leparsky for censorship, he was physically unable to examine them, even superficially, but was obliged to stamp them. Not knowing many European languages, Leparsky nonetheless had to write that he had "read" a book written in a language he did not know.

The arts were also not alien to some talented prisoners. Nikolai Bestuzhev was a rather original painter. Many of his colour and pencil portraits were kept in the family of my father-in-law, Dmitrii Startsev, who lived in Selenginsk. There still exist, I hope, the portraits of the Decembrists done in pencil by Nikolai Bestuzhev and given at one point to an acquaintance of mine in Moscow, who, as I have heard, immortalised them by publishing an album.[2]

In addition to painting, Nikolai Bestuzhev also busied himself with mechanics, repaired watches and made carriages and harnesses. He was very talented in all the arts and crafts. His two-wheeled cabriolets still have no equal in lightness and utility. They have spread across the whole of the region beyond Lake Baikal and Irkutsk

Gubernia. And most important of all, the spread of crafts in the region beyond Lake Baikal, and in particular among the Buryats, is wholly the work of N. Bestuzhev. Old Buryats still gratefully remember him.

Nikolai did a great deal of work to improve clock-chronometers. Specialists were loud in their praise of this improvement. As a sailor, Bestuzhev had devoted a great deal of time during his naval service to chronometry, since, as everyone knows, all naval calculations depend for their accuracy upon it. There was almost no branch of knowledge with which Bestuzhev was not acquainted, including agriculture. It was on his initiative that merino sheep were introduced in Selenginsk, the breeding of which was progressing very successfully and promised to develop if only the initiators of this undertaking had remained longer in the region.

Nikolai Bestuzhev was a rare patriot and in the hour of his death was deeply concerned about the fate of Sevastopol,[3] and his last words were about it: "Will Sevastopol hold out?"

Mikhail Bestuzhev outlived all his brothers: Nikolai, Alexander (Marlinsky) and Pavel. He died in Moscow, having returned after forty years in exile and having buried all his near ones and friends in Siberia.

His resources in Siberia were, as I have already said, very modest, without reducing him to poverty. In Selenginsk he lived on friendly terms with everyone, and was loved and respected by all. Many of his pupils have now "entered society", as it is put, and by their honesty and relatively good education have sharply distinguished themselves from the surrounding merchant milieu... He stayed the whole of the time in Selenginsk, never going elsewhere except on one trip to Kyakhta [90 versts from Selenginsk.—*Comp.*] to visit good friends whose sincere and repeated invitation he finally accepted...

"THEY HAD AN ENORMOUS MORAL INFLUENCE ON THE SIBERIANS: THEIR DIRECTNESS, THEIR UNFAILING COURTESY TO ALL, AND, AT THE SAME TIME, THEIR ELEVATED FEELINGS, RAISED THEM ABOVE EVERYONE ELSE."

From the Reminiscences of Maria Frantseva[1]

Maria Frantseva was the daughter of a government official, Dmitrii Frantsev, who served in Siberia from 1836 to 1854, extend-

ed his patronage to the Decembrists and was on friendly terms with many of their families, in particular the Fonvizins.

In those places in Siberia where they lived, the Decembrists won an extraordinary tribute of affection from the people. They had an enormous moral influence on the Siberians: their directness, their unfailing courtesy to all, and, at the same time, their elevated feelings, raised them above everyone else; they were equally accessible to all who turned to them for advice, in cases of illness or grief. Each felt their lively sympathy, their heartfelt response to his needs...

In Petrovsk, the wives of the Decembrists acquired their wooden houses, decorated them tastefully as far as they were able. Their husbands were permitted to come and visit them for a couple of hours, whereas previously they had been able to see each other only inside the prison...

It was particularly fortunate for the prisoners that their chief gaoler or commandant, General Leparsky, was an educated man, kind and intelligent, so that everyone loved and respected him. Nearly all of them still possess his portrait.

At the end of their sentence, many of the Decembrists were sent to reside in Siberian towns. The Fonvizins came to Yeniseisk in Krasnoyarsk Gubernia, where we also soon arrived and made their acquaintance. However, the health of Natalya Fonvizina was unable to withstand these heavy trials, and she was seriously ill. In particular she had often been ill and suffered in Chita and Petrovsk; the locality, surrounded by mountains, adversely affected her nerves, and it was there that she suffered her worst nervous ailment, from which she suffered over the course of ten years...

To begin with they rented an apartment, and then they bought their own wooden house with a garden; as Natalya [Fonvizina] was a great lover of flowers, she set her garden out with wonderful blooms, the seeds for which she had sent to her from Riga, and she also organised a conservatory and a hothouse; she even grew her own pineapples. Often friends would gather at their house of an evening to talk and debate. The Fonvizins received various journals, both Russian and foreign, followed political events and, indeed, everything that happened in Europe. Everything interested them. Their intelligent and engaging conversation was always highly informative.

In Siberia two children were born to the Fonvizins, and also died there in their infancy. Then they began to bring up other children...

In Tobolsk the exiled Decembrists made up a rather large circle. The majority of them had their own houses. Alexander Muravyov had a fine house with a large, shady garden; while still living near Irkutsk, in the village of Urik, he had married a German governess, Josephine Brackmann, a very pleasant and educated woman whom he loved passionately. They had four children, three daughters and a son, his father's favourite, who was remarkably gifted and endearing. They devoted a great deal of care to the upbringing of the children, and sent to Russia for governesses. Muravyov was richer than the rest, as his mother, Yekaterina Muravyova, who resided permanently in Moscow, realised the whole of his share in the property, which yielded around 300 thousand silver roubles, and sent him interest on it; which allowed him to live very comfortably in Tobolsk...

Doctor Ferdinand Wolf, another Decembrist, lived with the Muravyovs. They were close friends; as Wolf was a bachelor and alone, the Muravyovs had invited him to live with them. Wolf was a skilled physician, was careful to keep abreast of medical developments, and everyone placed great trust in him, coming to him for advice in the case of a particularly serious illness. He was remarkable for his willingness to be of assistance, never took money, and in general did not like to treat patients [for money.—*Comp.*]. When he was still living in Irkutsk, he made his name by curing a rich gold-miner of whom all the local practitioners had despaired. On recovering, the gold-miner, grateful to Doctor Wolf for having, as he put it, saved his life, but knowing that he never took payment for his visits, sent him five thousand paper roubles, together with a note in which he said that if Wolf did not accept the money, he would throw it into the fire in his presence. Doctor Wolf still did not accept the money.

The Muravyov family was very friendly with the Annenkov and Svistunov families (all three Decembrists had served together in the Cavalierguards Regiment)... When Annenkov was serving his sentence, his fiancee had arrived from St Petersburg, having herself requested Emperor Nicholas for permission to leave for Siberia to join her betrothed in penal servitude...

Having arrived in Chita, she stayed with some other

Decembrist wives, and a few days later married Ivan Annenkov. She quite literally adored her husband, and throughout her whole life continually displayed selfless devotion. Ivan, though very pleasant and agreeable in company, was far from having an easy character in private life. [His wife.—*Comp.*] tried to please him in every detail and to anticipate his wishes. While he was in prison, she herself, having no servants, prepared his favourite meals, dressed the whole family, was always cheerful and, typically French, was of a carefree disposition. In Tobolsk, where they subsequently went to live, they had five children. The boys attended the Tobolsk gymnasium, and the girls studied at home. They, too, had their own, very fine house in Tobolsk in which young people gathered and held dances to the accompaniment of the piano...

As Pyotr Svistunov was a lover of music and a fine musician, musical evenings were held at his house on Monday evenings, and quartets were organised; some young men played the violin, and some young women—the piano, and every musician who arrived in Tobolsk found at his home a warm welcome and appreciation of his talent. He took a lively interest in them, taking considerable trouble to help them organise their concerts, distribute tickets, and, as he was loved and respected by all in Tobolsk, he was very useful to poor musicians who, in this remote region, did not know how to thank him for his help.

Pyotr Svistunov had received an excellent education and was a remarkably intelligent man; he had a great sense of humour, and what in French is termed "caustique" [irony, caustic humour.—*Comp.*], which made him very agreeable in company. Although his lively and playful temperament was very French, he had a serious mind, his invariable integrity and constancy in friendship won him many friends, and his universal friendliness, combined with his refined manners and courtesy, disposed towards him all those who had any contact with him.

In all the so-called Decembrists, politeness was as if an innate quality. Full of respect for the human dignity of every individual, they were extremely affectionate to all those socially beneath them, and even to those who were in their service, whom they never permitted themselves to address in familiar terms. This attitude to their servants bound those servants to them, and some displayed in deed their loyalty, the gratitude they felt in

their hearts, not to mention those devoted servants who had shared the unhappy fate of their masters from the beginning; such, for example, was the Fonvizins' nanny, Matryona, who went of her own accord to live with them in Siberia during their exile, and returned to Russia only when the Fonvizins themselves returned. She was remarkable for her devotion, her truthfullness and honesty; another such person, Anissya, lived with the Naryshkins; she also stayed with her master and mistress from the beginning to the end of their exile. These people were, in the end, no longer servants but loyal friends sharing griefs and joys.

For a long time the Svistunovs were without children. When, at last, their daughter Magdalina was born, they loved and spoilt her impossibly. Soon after this their son, Ivan, and daughter, Yekaterina, were born in Tobolsk, and then later, in Kaluga, after their return from exile, their youngest daughter, Barbara. The Svistunovs also lived for fifteen years in Tobolsk, and were always on friendly terms with everyone. The Governor's wife, Engelke, was very fond of Pyotr [Svistunov], and he often attended her musical evenings. In general, the governors and other prominent officials treated the Decembrists with great respect, were always the first to pay them a visit, and took pride in being on good terms with them.

The Svistunovs had one of their companions, the Decembrist Pavel Bobrishchev-Pushkin, living with them... Svistunov, a friend of Pavel, had offered him a room in their house...

Pavel Bobrishchev-Pushkin was a remarkable person... Devoting his life to the service of his fellows, he sought to bring about a fundamental change in his habits, loved to read the Bible, which he knew as well as any theologian, led an almost ascetic life, developing in himself the noble qualities of forbearance and lack of malice, was equally well disposed to all and tolerant of their flaws. In Tobolsk he also took up the study of homoeopathy, and helped a great number of people there by treating them without pay, so that there was a constant flow of people, particularly the poor. Finally Bobrishchev-Pushkin became so renowned for his homoeopathic treatment that he had to acquire a horse and carriage in order to visit all his patients. The horse was small, and we called it Konyok-Gorbunok (little hunch-backed pony), his summer carriage was four-wheeled, while his winter

carriage was a one-horse sledge. In these he would pack his homoeopathic text-books, his medicine chest from Moscow, a change of clothes in case the weather should suddenly change—in winter an extra fur coat, in summer a warm, padded cloth overcoat whose owner always took it with him on his trips (the weather in Tobolsk is very changeable, and it could happen that during one and the same day it was first cold, and then very hot); when everything was packed, Pavel himself, well wrapped up not only in winter but even in summer, would come out and get into the carriage, take the reins in his hands and set off to help the sick. Wherever he went he was given a joyous welcome, and to each and all he gave the comfort of a kind word, heartfelt sympathy and good advice. He had a highly developed mind, began his education in Moscow, in a boarding-school for the children of noblemen, and completed it in the famous institution run by Nikolai Muravyov, which prepared officers for general headquarters. If necessary, Pavel could also be an architect, a joiner and a tailor. If someone needed a plan drawing up—they turned to Bobrishchev-Pushkin, if they wanted to build a house or make up an estimate—he would calculate everything with his mathematical head down to the last penny. He was particularly friendly with the Fonvizins, the Svistunovs and our family. While we were still children we so loved him that, when we grew up, we looked upon him as our closest friend. If it happened that one of us fell ill, we immediately sent for Pavel, and he arrived in a moment on his little hunch-backed pony.

My father greatly loved and respected Pavel, and was amazed at his unremitting selflessness...

When cholera struck Tobolsk in 1848, Bobrishchev-Pushkin, entirely forgetful of himself, helped everyone with his homoeopathy. Sometimes it would happen that all day one would see the little hunch-backed pony pulling the carriage first to one end of the town, and then the other, with its tireless driver aboard. The need for help was so great that even the Fonvizins and the Svistunovs, on the instructions of Bobrishchev-Pushkin, treated patients who came in his absence during that disastrous time... All in all, he provided much valuable assistance during that dreadful epidemic; a record was kept of all the patients who came to see him, and then the total was added up, and showed that they had treated around 700 people using homoeopathy.

The years of my youth, spent in Siberia, will always remain in my memory; they are full of the fondest recollections of association from childhood with people who were not only gifted and intellectually developed, but who had a profound understanding of the high purpose of human life on this earth...

"ONLY A FEW FORTUNATES LIVED TO THE END OF THEIR EXILE."

Nikolai Belogolovy on the Return of the Decembrists from Siberia. From "Reminiscences of a Siberian about the Decembrists"[1]

The bearer to the Decembrists of the joyous news of their liberation from thirty years of exile was the son of the Volkonskys, Michel, who was in Moscow on the day of the coronation, and it was he that General Muravyov, with his typically warm-hearted sensitivity, chose to be the courier to take the manifesto of clemency to Irkutsk and thus be the first to inform his parents and their friends of the end of their Siberian sufferings and the late dawn of their new life. On the evening of the very day on which the manifesto was published, the young Volkonsky set off, riding at breakneck speed over the enormous distance between Moscow and Irkutsk* in the roadless autumn mud in just 17 days, and brought to his elderly parents the long awaited news of their liberation. However, in Irkutsk and Eastern Siberia only a few fortunates lived to the end of their exile. The bones of the majority had long since been laid to rest in the modest cemeteries of Siberian settlements and villages. The aged Volkonskys and Trubetskoy with his son immediately made use of their right to return and, barely able to wait for winter to set in, left Irkutsk. At first Poggio did not wish to depart from Siberia; he still hoped that his mining venture[2] would enable him to provide for his family, but the more time passed, the feebler his hopes became, and finally his mining venture not only did not enrich him but, on the contrary, swallowed up the modest capital

* More than 5,500 kilometres.

which he had invested in it; in a word, it was the same story which so often repeated itself in Siberia. The future could not but present itself in gloomy colours to the old man; he had already passed sixty, and he clearly understood that in Irkutsk he could not even earn a reasonable living by giving lessons, let alone provide for his wife and child in case of his death. At that time, his eldest nephew, A. Poggio, the son of the Decembrist Osip [Poggio.—*Comp.*] suggested that he come and live with him on his estate near St Petersburg, where he would be able to live out his life peacefully and provide materially for his family. His nephew wrote that this was not charity on his part, but simply his duty, as he had not, in his opinion, fully paid for that share in the property which he had acquired following his uncle's exile to Siberia, and Alexander Poggio, not seeing any other alternative, decided to take up this proposal.

In 1859, on 3 May, he set off on the return journey from that gloomy region where he had been fated to pass almost half of his life; he had gone there in the prime of his youth and health, but with a blasted future, broken hopes, without the slightest opening onto a better life; he returned a grey-haired old man, but with the same eternally youthful and affectionate heart, which obliged him to regret deeply his departure from Siberia, to which he had become sincerely attached, and where he had acquired many dear friends, and even his own family, but, on the other hand, he could not but rejoice that he had brought this family out into freedom and the expanses of European civilisation.

Of the Decembrists who did not avail themselves of the amnesty and who remained to live out their lives in Siberia, there were, it seems, just two: Gorbachevsky and Bechasnov, if one does not include Dmitrii Zavalishin, who, for his articles published in the *Morskoi Sbornik* (Mariner's Journal) and revealing various administrative errors by [Count Muravyov-Amursky.—*Comp.*] Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, was sent from Siberia against his will on the request of Count Muravyov-Amursky and settled in Moscow, where he died at the end of the 1880's. [in 1892.—*Comp.*] Gorbachevsky lived in Petrovsky Zavod, beyond Lake Baikal, which he never left, and he died there in the 1860's, leaving behind wonderful memories of himself among both his friends and the local population.

"AS A FACT, THE INSURRECTION OF 14 DECEMBER HAS HAD FEW CONSEQUENCES, BUT AS A PRINCIPLE IT HAS TREMENDOUS SIGNIFICANCE."

Mikhail Lunin. "The Social Movement in Russia in the Present Reign"[1]

In 1840, Mikhail Lunin wrote the essay *The Social Movement in Russia in the Present Reign*, that is, in the reign of Nicholas I. In this essay, Lunin set himself the aim of tracing the influence of the Secret Society of Decembrists on the subsequent development of Russia. This influence, in Lunin's opinion, expressed itself in three spheres: 1) the government had made several concessions—it could not fail to take into account the demands of the Secret Society, which had literally opened the government's eyes to blatant disorder in the economy and in the administration (the management) of military affairs; 2) at the same time the government, in order to prevent a new revolutionary demonstration in the country, intensified repression of new ideas and reinforced the repressive apparatus; 3) the Secret Society of Decembrists had stimulated social initiative in Russia (in other words, had brought into being a new generation of freedom-fighters).

The fifteen years of the present reign constitute a period sufficiently long and sufficiently rich in events to determine the influence which it must have on the fate of the nation. Russia has made great sacrifices over this period and suffered disasters reminiscent of the troubled times in her history. These facts, important in themselves, are worthy of our particular attention in view of their simultaneous existence with the appearance of new principles within the old order of things. Almost all the successions to the Russian throne, beginning with Peter I, have been marked by palace revolutions carried out in the dark for reasons of vested interest. The accession of Emperor Nicholas I, on the contrary, was heralded by events which had the character of a public protest against that arbitrariness which means that the fate of the state is disposed of by means of secret wills and furtive abdications; against the undignified imposition of two oaths upon the people—consecutive and contradictory; against the practice of treating the people as one's own private property. As a fact, the insurrection of 26 (14) December has had few consequences, but as a principle it has tremendous significance. It is the first official expression of public will in favour of a representative

system and the constitutional ideas spread by the Russian Secret Society...

Public well-being could not advance under the weight of such disastrous conditions; it could only inevitably decline in the course of this period, despite the new resources offered by Siberia, which is lavishly pouring out its gold; and Russia, weakened by sicknesses and hunger, tortured by revolts and uprisings, exhausted by fruitless wars, impoverished as a result of new taxes and crushed by constantly increasing debts, is now in a worse condition, as regards material well-being, than in the last reign. Let us look at its condition, both political and moral, in order to discover to what degree the government has succeeded, by zealous efforts, in healing its wounds, recuperating its losses and solacing its griefs.

At the beginning of the present reign, the cause of the Secret Society shed clear light on the country's need for progressive cultural development. Public opinion and popular sympathy were on the side of the authorities, freed for a moment from the conditions which isolate them from the people under an autocratic regime... They were able to see that constitutional ideas had penetrated deeply into people's minds, that intellectual and moral activity is already cramped within the framework of the present regime, and that it is the common desire of the Russians to see the introduction of the representative system solemnly proclaimed and promised during the previous reign...

The state of the nation's finances eludes our examination behind the thick fog which surrounds them under the autocratic regime. We pay, but we do not know where our money goes. We do not even know with any certainty how much we pay, as the venality of judges and the corruption of the administration take from us as much as, if not more than, the government. All the more so as today we pay so much, and tomorrow we may be obliged to pay twice this amount. These thoughts naturally spread among the mass of the people and influence their moral attitude, alienating them from the regime, which does not have the ability or the desire to secure property...

Another question, no less important—the slavery of the peasants—remains open. Several million of our brothers, deprived of civil rights, sold wholesale and retail as if they were chattels, have found no sympathy to this day except on the part of the Secret Society. It alone understood

their calamitous position and took into account the consequences, it alone held out a helping hand amidst universal indifference and oppression. Neither the landowners nor the government—although the Secret Society drew their attention to the blatant injustice of slavery and to the unavoidable danger which follows from all injustice—did anything to lighten the lot of the peasants and avert the storms gathering above their heads. When disaster occurs, they have no other means than military force, as during the Polish uprising [1830—1831.—*Comp.*]. But this force, sometimes effective against strangers, may prove vain and helpless against Russians. Moreover, there is still the question of whether the soldiers, although trained to obedience, will turn their bayonets against their brothers. The ray of consciousness which prompts the peasants to defend their legitimate rights may equally penetrate the body of soldiers and turn them from a blind weapon of the authorities into a noble ally of the oppressed...

Slavery, instituted by laws, is a fertile source of immorality for all the classes of the population; the lack of publicity encourages and develops the disorders that flow thence in various forms, granting them impunity; finally, the confusion of powers misguides minds, violating the laws of morality which should govern family and public relations. All the medicines applied to the social organism which are not able to deal directly with these major causes of illness will be merely vain charlatanism, more liable to aggravate the disease by concealing it than to produce a radical cure.

The upbringing of the future generation is habitually neglected; young people follow their personal inclinations, lacking a purpose sufficiently important for them to dedicate to it their lives. During this period there has not appeared even one literary or scientific work of any value. Poetry has hung its lyre on the willows of Babylon; periodical publications express only lies or that flattery so harmful to the power that tolerates it. The Ministry of Public Education, losing sight of its true purpose, which consists in spreading positive knowledge, is seeking to introduce nationalism, to support teachings not worthy of human support, and to turn even the sciences into pillars of the autocracy. Hence the ignorance which has become the distinguishing feature of the present age.

In essence nothing has changed. The same silence in the State Council, the same corruption in the governing

Senate, the same idolatry in the Synod. The people and the government suffer equally, because they have put aside moral authority, the only authority capable of serving as a mediator in order to consult and agree over common interests.

If, from the depths of the Siberian wastes, our exiles were able to raise their voice, they would have the right to say to the leaders of the ruling party: "What have you done for the good of the people in the course of these fifteen years? You took it upon you to follow upon the previous reign, under which began the emancipation of the peasants, the Poles were granted a constitution, and the solemn promise was given to provide a representative system for the Russians: the peasants have not been emancipated, the Poles have been deprived of their constitution, and the Russians have been deceived in their most cherished hopes. You undertook to heed and develop all ideas concerning improvements that were put forward legally, but you have made their expression impossible, surrounding the freedom of the press with new restrictions, impeding relations with Europe and paralysing the influence of civilising elements by means of retrograde systems. We preached the cult of law, you preach the cult of the personality, preserving the robes of monarchs in the churches as a new kind of relic. You undertook to purify Russia of the infection of liberal ideas and have plunged it into the abyss of laxity, the vices of espionage and the darkness of ignorance. You extinguished with the hand of the executioner the minds which illumined and guided the development of the social movement, and what have you put in their place? We, in our turn, summon you to the court of our contemporaries and descendants: what is your answer!"

Social disasters are a warning which providence gives to kings and peoples in order to enlighten them as regards their reciprocal obligations. Those disasters which Russia has experienced, and from which she suffers to this day will not pass without trace or without benefit. We must hope that the last years of this reign, which, according to the natural course of things, has already completed the major part of its duration, will be marked by a frank and sincere return to the basic principles which the progressive movement of the nations imperatively demands and which cannot be replaced by words and formulas...

"THIRTY YEARS PASSED, AND IT BECAME CLEAR THAT HAPPINESS IS NOT IN SIBERIA NOR IN ST PETERSBURG BUT IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT."

Lev Tolstoy on the Return of the Decembrists[1]

In 1859, the great Russian writer, Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910), whose novels *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection* are known throughout the world, conceived of writing a novel to be called *The Decembrists*. After reading the fifth issue of Herzen's almanach *Polyarnaya Zvezda* (Polar Star), which was devoted entirely to the Decembrists, Tolstoy wrote to him: "You cannot imagine how interesting I find all the information on the Decembrists in the *Polyarnaya Zvezda*. About four months ago I began a novel whose hero is to be a Decembrist returned from exile." The prototype for this Decembrist was to be Sergei Volkonsky. Tolstoy first met him in 1859 in Moscow, and then again in 1861 in Florence; he was full of admiration for the simplicity and wisdom of this "biblical patriarch". "He was an amazing old man. What a pity that I then talked so little with him," said Tolstoy later with regret. By the end of 1860, Tolstoy had already written three chapters of his novel, which he read to Ivan Turgenev. However, before continuing the novel about the Decembrists, Tolstoy first set about describing the sources of the movement—life in Russia at the beginning of the 19th century, and the war against Napoleon in 1812, which was the main starting point. Thus came into being the novel *War and Peace*, initially intended as a prologue to *The Decembrists*. However, Tolstoy was not able to carry out his intentions; even for the famous writer the main documentary material—the documents of the enquiry and the trial of the Decembrists—proved inaccessible. Up to his death the idea of this novel continued to haunt the author. However, then came the revolution of 1905-1907, which made temporarily available the secret archives of the tsars. The well-known Russian critic, Vladimir Stasov, sent sheaves of documents to Tolstoy, who read them "with perturbation and joy", writing to Stasov that they "called forth an unusual increase in the scope of my intentions". "I wish I were a young man, so that I could sit down anew to my work." he complained. But there was little time left... The novel remained unwritten.

I had the opportunity to see the Decembrists who returned from Siberia, and I knew their companions and contemporaries who betrayed them and remained in Russia to enjoy every kind of honour and wealth. The Decembrists, who drew on their inner life to live through penal servitude and exile, returned thirty years later with lively spirits, intelligent, cheerful, while those who had remained in Russia and had passed their life in state ser-

vice, attending dinners and playing cards, were pathetic ruins, of no use for anything or to anyone, and had done nothing worthy of being remembered; it seemed that the unfortunates were those who were condemned and exiled, and the fortunates those who saved themselves, but thirty years passed, and it became clear that happiness is not in Siberia nor in St Petersburg but in the human spirit, and that penal servitude and exile, imprisonment, were happiness, and the rank of general, wealth and freedom were great disasters...

"RAISED UP ON THE SCAFFOLD, THESE PEOPLE AWOKE THE SOUL OF A NEW GENERATION."

Alexander Herzen. From the Essay "On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia"[1]

The historical essay *On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia*, written by Alexander Herzen in 1850, offers an analysis of socio-political life in Russia beginning with the reign of Peter I. Below is an extract which gives Herzen's evaluation of the situation in the country 25 years after 14 December 1825.

...14/26 December indeed opened a new phase in our political education, and—strange as it may appear—the cause of the great influence which this affair has acquired and which has affected society more than propaganda, more than theory, was the insurrection itself, the heroic behaviour of the conspirators on the square, at the trial, in chains, before Emperor Nicholas himself, and in the Siberian mines. The Russians lacked an event which would inspire in them the boldness of initiative. Theory inspires conviction, example determines action... Along with civilisation there naturally developed ideas of freedom—people wished to free themselves of despotism—but no one wished to be the first to begin.

And then came the first, displaying such grandeur of spirit, such strength of character, that the government did not dare, in its official report,[2] to denigrate them nor shame them; Nicholas contented himself with harsh punishment. The silence, the mute inaction, came to an end; raised up on the scaffold, these people awoke the soul of a new generation; the scales fell from our eyes...

Externally, Russia seemed to continue to stay where it was, even to move backwards, but in fact everything had assumed a new form, questions became more complex, and decisions less simple.

On the surface of official Russia, the "Empire of appearances", only losses, harsh reaction, inhuman persecution, the intensification of despotism, could be observed. Surrounded by mediocrities, soldiers for the peoples, the Baltic Germans and savage conservatives, Nicholas could be seen—suspicious, cold, stubborn, pitiless, without any greatness of spirit—just such a mediocrity as those who surrounded him. Immediately beneath him stood the aristocracy which, at the first crash of thunder[3] over its head following 14 December, lost its poorly assimilated ideas of honour and dignity. The Russian aristocracy was unable to recover in the reign of Nicholas, the days of its glory were spent; all that it possessed of nobility and greatness languished in the mines or in Siberia...

Barracks and bureaucracy became the mainstays of the political system under Nicholas I. Blind, senseless discipline combined with soulless official formalism—such were the springs of the famous mechanism of strong power in Russia... In a word, the picture of official Russia inspired only despair...

However, within the state a great work was taking place—mute, silent, but effective and unceasing; everywhere discontent was growing, revolutionary ideas spread further during these twenty-five years than they had during the entire preceding century...

The influence of literature is noticeably increasing and penetrating further than before; it is not betraying its calling, but is preserving its liberal and educative character as far as censorship permits.

The whole of the new generation was seized with a thirst for learning; whether the schools are civilian or military, gymnasiums, lyceums or academies, they are overflowing with students; the children of the poorest parents are seeking to enter various institutes... Moscow University is becoming the temple of Russian civilisation; the emperor dislikes it intensely, is angry with it, sends into exile every year whole groups of its graduates and, on coming to Moscow, does not favour it with a visit; but the university is flourishing, its influence is increasing; not enjoying imperial favour, it expects nothing, continues its work and is becoming a genuine force...

"...WE CLEARLY SEE THE THREE GENERATIONS, THE THREE CLASSES, THAT WERE ACTIVE IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION. AT FIRST IT WAS NOBLES AND LANDLORDS, THE DECEMBRISTS AND HERZEN."

From the Article by V. I. Lenin "In Memory of Herzen"[1]

The article "In Memory of Herzen" by Lenin was written in April 1912 on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Herzen's birth, and in a situation marked by the gathering clouds of a new "revolutionary storm" following the revolution of 1905-1907, that is, on the eve of the overthrow of the autocracy. Lenin describes Herzen as a representative of the aristocratic revolutionary movement, to which the Decembrists also belonged, and also as an outstanding Russian revolutionary democrat "who played a great part in paving the way for the Russian revolution". The article emphasises the links between the successive generations of revolutionaries and the importance of revolutionary traditions in the Russian liberation movement.

The nobility gave Russia the Birons[2] and Arakcheyevs, innumerable "drunken officers, bullies, gamblers, heroes of fairs, masters of hounds, roisterers, floggers, pimps", as well as amiable Manilovs.[3] "But," wrote Herzen, "among them developed the men of December 14, a phalanx of heroes reared, like Romulus and Remus, on the milk of a wild beast... They were veritable titans, hammered out of pure steel from head to foot, comrades-in-arms who deliberately went to certain death in order to awaken the young generation to a new life and to purify the children born in an environment of tyranny and servility."

Herzen was one of those children. The uprising of the Decembrists awakened and "purified" him. In the feudal Russia of the forties of the nineteenth century, he rose to a height which placed him on a level with the greatest thinkers of his time....

Herzen founded a free Russian press abroad, and that is the great service rendered by him. *Polyarnaya Zvezda* took up the traditions of the Decembrists. *Kolokol* (1857-1867) championed the emancipation of the peasants with might and main. The slavish silence was broken...

In commemorating Herzen, we clearly see the three generations, the three classes, that were active in the Russian revolution. At first it was nobles and land-

lords, the Decembrists and Herzen. These revolutionaries formed but a narrow group. They were very far removed from the people. But their effort was not in vain. The Decembrists awakened Herzen. Herzen began the work of revolutionary agitation.

This work was taken up, extended, strengthened, and tempered by the revolutionary raznochintsi—from Chernyshevsky[4] to the heroes of Narodnaya Volya.[5] The range of fighters widened; their contact with the people became closer. "The young helmsmen of the gathering storm" is what Herzen called them. But it was not yet the storm itself.

The storm is the movement of the masses themselves. The proletariat, the only class that is thoroughly revolutionary, rose at the head of the masses and for the first time aroused millions of peasants to open revolutionary struggle. The first onslaught in this storm took place in 1905.[6] The next is beginning to develop under our very eyes.[7]

In commemorating Herzen, the proletariat is learning from his example to appreciate the great importance of revolutionary theory. It is learning that selfless devotion to the revolution and revolutionary propaganda among the people are not wasted even if long decades divide the sowing from the harvest. It is learning to ascertain the role of the various classes in the Russian and in the international revolution. Enriched by these lessons, the proletariat will fight its way to a free alliance with the socialist workers of all lands, having crushed that loathsome monster, the tsarist monarchy, against which Herzen was the first to raise the great banner of struggle by addressing his *free Russian word* to the masses.

NOTES

A Few Words to the Reader

[1] Nicholas I (1796-1855)—Russian emperor (1825-1855).

[2] Alexander Herzen (1812-1870)—a prominent Russian revolutionary democrat, writer and philosopher, the founder of the Russian free press in London (1853), the publisher of the almanac *Polyarnaya Zvezda* (Polar Star) and the newspaper *Kolokol* (The Bell), in which he conducted revolutionary propaganda.

Mikhail Lunin. "A Look at the Secret Society in Russia (1816-1826)"

This tract by Lunin contains a brief description and evaluation of the history of the Secret Society of Decembrists made from a revolutionary standpoint. The tract was written in 1838, when Lunin was in exile, and was intended for publication abroad with a view to acquainting the European public with the true causes, tasks and aims of the Secret Society, which were not mentioned in official documents. Extracts from the tract are quoted from Herzen's publication *Polyarnaya Zvezda*, Book 5th, London, 1859, pp. 231-237.

[1] A reference to the agreement concluded on 15 June 1215, between King John of England and his rebellious barons. This agreement was known as Magna Carta.

[2] The sale of wine and salt was a state monopoly and subject to indirect taxation. The right to collect this tax could be farmed out (that is, for paying to the state a fixed amount of tax) to private individuals.

[3] In Russia at the time of the Decembrists, conscript service lasted for 25 years. The Decembrists demanded that this be reduced to 15 years.

[4] The setting up of a network of military settlements in 1816 was one of the most reactionary acts of tsarist government. Apart from military service, the inhabitants of these settlements were obliged to earn their living by means of farming. The peasants in the military settlements were doomed to military service for life.

[5] The main source of income for the Russian clergy was payment by parishioners for various religious services—baptisms, marriages, funerals, etc. This rendered the clergy dependent on their congregation.

[6] A reference to Decembrist support for the Greek uprising in 1821 against Ottoman rule.

[7] In his speech at the opening of the Polish Seym on 15 March 1818, in Warsaw, Alexander I alluded to his intention to grant a constitution to Russia.

I. "Of Reflection the Noble Aspiration."

[1] Stepan Razin (1630-1671)—the leader of a peasant war in 1670-1671; Yemelyan Pugachov (1740-1775)—the leader of a peasant war in 1773-1775.

[2] The imperial Committee of Enquiry was set up on 17 December 1825 to investigate the Decembrist affair.

[3] Alexei Arakcheyev (1769-1834)—a favourite of Emperor Alexander I, from 1808 minister of war, from 1815 the tsar's "prime minister" and virtual head of the state.

[4] Alexander I (1777-1825)—Russian emperor (1801-1825).

[5] The members of the Decembrist Society of Associated Slavs put forward the idea of uniting all Slavs in a federative union based on the principles of "Democracy, Equality and Fraternity".

[6] The Chernigovsky Regiment was stationed in the Ukraine. Its Headquarters were located in the small town of Vasilkov (30 km west of Kiev). Sergei Muravyov-Apostol was the commander of one of the battalions of this regiment. The insurrection in this regiment lasted from 29 December 1825 to 3 January 1826.

Pavel Pestel on the Formation of His Revolutionary Views. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry

1 The text of the testimony given by Pestel is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. IV, Moscow-Leningrad, 1927, pp. 89-92, 105 (in Russian).

[2] This short biographical sketch of Pestel is taken from the reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin, a friend of Pestel and a member of the Secret Society. The text of this extract is quoted from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Southern Society*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 16-17 (in Russian).

[3] Pyotr Witgenstein (1768-1842)—a count and fieldmarshal-general in command of the 2nd Army, then stationed in the south of Russia.

[4] "The advantages enjoyed by other annexed regions". A reference to Poland and Finland, which had been annexed to Russia and had received a constitutional form of government.

[5] A reference to the restoration of Louis XVIII to the French throne in 1814. The Bourbon dynasty was overthrown in 1792 by the French Revolution.

[6] Pestel is referring to the Jacobin terror in France in 1793.

[7] The essay by Destutt de Tracy entitled *Commentaire sur L'Esprit des Lois de Montesquieu* was published in 1811 and 1819.

[8] The Novgorod Republic to which Pestel is referring existed in Rus from the beginning of the 12th century to the 15th century. Like other Decembrists, Pestel idealised the republican system of ancient Novgorod.

[9] A reference to the revolutions which occurred in these countries in 1820-1821.

[10] "The events of 1812, 13, 14 and 15"—that is, the war against Napoleon, the foreign campaigns of the Russian army in 1813-1814 and the defeat of Napoleon in 1815.

A Letter from Alexander Bestuzhev to Emperor Nicholas I from the SS Peter and Paul Fortress

[1] The letter is reproduced from the text of the publication *From the Letters and Statements of the Decembrists. A Critique of the Contemporary Situation in Russia and Plans for a Future System*, St Petersburg, 1906, pp. 35-42 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to the war against Napoleon (1805-1807) which ended in 1807 with the Tilsit Peace Treaty, disadvantageous to Russia, and to the wars with Sweden (1808-1809), with Turkey (1806-1812) and with Persia (1804-1813).

[3] The Russian merchant class was divided, according to the size of declared capital (and the amount of tax to be paid on this capital) into three guilds (ranks). The merchants of the first and second guilds were exempt from compulsory military service and were granted certain privileges in discharging their state obligations.

[4] Governor-General—the highest administrative post in tsarist Russia. Beneath him came the gubernial commissioners, who together formed the governor-generalship.

[5] Lancaster schools—a monitorial system of instruction in which the senior pupils, under the supervision of the teacher, taught the junior pupils writing and arithmetic. This system arose in 18th century in England. It was first used in Russia at the beginning of the 19th century in the army.

[6] The Russian clergy was divided into the black (celibate) and the white (married clergy and their families).

[7] In the middle of the 18th century the distillation of wine, a profitable branch of industry, was declared a monopoly of the nobility.

From the Testimony of Pyotr Borisov to the Committee of Enquiry

[1] The text of the testimony of Pyotr Borisov is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. V, Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, p. 22 (in Russian).

[2] Plutarch (45-127)—an Ancient Greek writer and historian; Cornelius Nepos (1st century B.C.)—an Ancient Roman writer and the author of biographies of famous people of his day.

[3] In tsarist Russia, a junior officer in the artillery was termed a feuerwerker.

[4] The punitive measure here described referred to corporal punishment of the offending soldier. Stripped to the waist, the soldier was beaten with sticks in the presence of the assembled company.

A Letter Written by Pyotr Kakhovsky in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress to Emperor Nicholas I

[1] The text of the letter by Pyotr Kakhovsky is taken from the publication *From the Letters and Statements of the Decembrists. A Critique of the Contemporary Situation in Russia and Plans for a Future System*, St Petersburg, 1906, pp. 1-32 (in Russian).

[2] "He helped Ferdinand suppress the legitimate rights of the people of Spain". A reference to the suppression in 1823 of the revolution in Spain with the help of French troops, and the restoration of the absolute power of the Spanish king Ferdinand VII. Alexander I supported the restoration of absolutism in Spain.

Vladimir Rayevsky. From "Reflections on the Slavery of the Peasants"

[1] This tract was written by Rayevsky at the end of 1821-beginning of 1822. These extracts are taken from the publication: V. Rayevsky. *Materials on His Life and Revolutionary Activity*, Vol. I, Irkutsk, 1980, pp. 93-101 (in Russian).

[2] "Catherine II abolished the word slavery on paper". Catherine II (1729-1796)—Russian empress (1762-1796). While expanding the privileges of the nobility and increasing the dependence of the serfs, she hypocritically avoided any reference in official documents to "slavery" and "serfdom".

[3] Areopagus—in the cities of Ancient Greece, an organ of power composed of members of the tribal aristocracy.

[4] Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)—an Ancient Greek scholar, philosopher and politician.

Yakov Andreyevich on the Reasons Why He Joined the Secret Society. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry

[1] The text of the testimony of Andreyevich is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. V, Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, pp. 382-388 (in Russian).

Mikhail Fonvizin. "On The Causes of the Emergence of Secret Societies in Russia"

[1] The extract is taken from the publication M. Fonvizin. *Essays and Letters*, Vol. 2, Irkutsk, 1982, pp. 180-185 (in Russian).

[2] Napoleon, emperor of France, was overthrown in 1815.

[3] "The two unsuccessful wars against Napoleon". Fonvizin has in mind the participation of Russia in the anti-Napoleonic coalition in 1805 and 1807.

[4] Tugendbund—the Union of Virtue. It was formed in 1808 as a secret organisation of liberal Prussian aristocrats, government officials and intellectuals, and was intended to inculcate a spirit of patriotism in the German people, who were then under the rule of Napoleon following the defeat of Prussia in 1806. Napoleon obliged the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm III, to issue a decree in 1809 dissolving the Tugendbund. The statutes and the activities of the Tugendbund attracted the attention of the Decembrists in the early days of the Decembrist societies.

[5] Klemens Metternich (1773-1859)—minister of foreign affairs and later chancellor of the Austrian Empire, one of the creators of the reactionary Holy Alliance (founded in 1815) of European states, of which Russia was also a member.

[6] The congresses of the Holy Alliance—in Vienna (1815), Aachen (1818), Troppau-Leibach (1820) and Verona (1822)—were convened to take measures to combat the growing revolutionary movement in Europe.

Nikolai Turgenev. From Diary Notes

[1] The diary notes of Turgenev are taken from the publication *The Archives of the Turgenev Brothers. Diaries and Letters*, Vol. 3, St Petersburg, 1911, pp. 161-191 (in Russian).

[2] "Arzamas"—a literary circle which existed in St Petersburg between 1815 and 1818, and which was close to the Decembrists in its ideas and opinions. Alexander Pushkin was a member of this circle.

[3] Nikolai Turgenev had received news of the beginning of the revolution in Spain, of the fact that the Spanish king, Ferdinand VII, had been obliged to convene the Cortes, the supreme representative organ of power, and to swear loyalty to the Constitution.

[4] By the "first time" Turgenev implies the liberation war waged by the Spanish people between 1808 and 1812 against Napoleon.

From the "Notes" of Ivan Yakushkin

[1] The text of the "Notes" by Yakushkin is taken from the publication *Notes, Articles and Letters of the Decembrist Yakushkin*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1951 (in Russian).

[2] Cantonists—the name given in Russia between 1805 and 1865 to the sons of private soldiers, who came under the military authorities from birth.

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Union of Salvation and the Union of Welfare. From the "Notes" of Trubetskoy

[1] The extracts from the memoirs of Trubetskoy on the early Decembrist organisations are taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 26-33 (in Russian).

[2] The Manifesto of 30 August 1814, proclaiming the expulsion of the enemy from Russia and the end of the war against Napoleon, granted various "favours" to the aristocracy, the clergy and the merchants. About the peasants, who had borne the brunt of the war, the Manifesto stated: "The peasants, our loyal people, will receive their reward from God".

[3] This project was embodied in laws issued between 1816 and 1819, which emancipated the serfs of Estland and Lifland (modern Estonia and Latvia), but without land.

[4] Ivan Witt (1781-1849)—a general who had served with the cavalry, and the chief of the southern military settlements.

From the Testimony of Pavel Pestel on the Union of Welfare

[1] Pestel describes an important event in the history of the Union of Welfare—the conference held in January 1820, at the apartment of Fyodor Glinka in St Petersburg, and the adoption at this conference of a decision to fight for a republic. The text of the testimony is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. IV, Moscow-Leningrad, 1927, pp. 101-102 (in Russian).

[2] Elizabeth (1779-1826)—Russian empress, wife of Alexander I.

[3] The Tulchin Duma. A reference to one of the southern branches of the Union of Welfare. In March 1821, the Southern Society of Decembrists, headed by Pavel Pestel, was created on the basis of this branch.

From the Statutes of the Union of Welfare (The Green Book)

[1] The statutes received their name from the colour of the cover of the book in which they were written. Here we quote the main articles of the first part of the statutes. The second part, which contained the "concealed" aim of the Society, has not come down to us. As the statements of the Decembrists reveal, it existed in draft form, was known to only a narrow circle of members of the Society and, when the Union of Welfare was disbanded in 1821, was destroyed to prevent its discovery. The text of the articles of the statutes is taken from the book by Alexander Pypin, *The Social Movement in Russia Under Alexander I*, St Petersburg, 1908, pp. 549-575 (in Russian).

From "A Brief Description of Various Secret Societies Whose Real Or Fictitious Existence Was Discovered by the Committee of Enquiry". Early Decembrist Organisations

[1] The text of the report on early Decembrist organisations is taken from the original kept in the archives (USSR Central State Archives of the October Revolution, Fund No. 38, File No. 332-a, pp. 1-3).

[2] Alexander Tatishchev (1762-1833)—a general who had served with the infantry, minister of war, chairman of the Committee of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair.

Vladimir Rayevsky. From "Reflections on the Soldier"

[1] The tract by Rayevsky entitled "Reflections on the Soldier" was written in January-February 1821. Here it is reproduced in abridged form from the publication: V. Rayevsky. *Materials on His Life and Revolutionary Activity*, Vol. I, Irkutsk, 1980, pp. 86-92 (in Russian).

[2] Peter I (the Great), (1672-1725)—Russian tsar (1682-1725), took the title of emperor in 1721.

[3] Mikhail Miloradovich (1771-1825)—military governor-general of St Petersburg, killed during the insurrection on 14 December 1825.

[4] Mikhail Vorontsov (1782-1856)—fieldmarshal-general in command of the occupying forces in France between 1815 and 1818. Later he was appointed the tsar's plenipotentiary in the Caucasus and was commander of the Caucasian Corps between 1830 and 1853, when Russia was at war with the mountain tribes.

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. "The Semyonovsky Affair of 1820"

[1] The text of the recollections of Muravyov-Apostol about this event is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Southern Society*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 178-184 (in Russian).

[2] Yakov Potyomkin (1778-1831)—major-general, commander of the Life-Guards of the Semyonovsky Regiment until 1819.

[3] Mikhail (1798-1849)—Grand Prince Mikhail, younger brother of Alexander I.

[4] Pavel I (1754-1801)—Russian emperor (1796-1801).

[5] Vasilii Levashov (1783-1848)—adjutant-general, later president of the military court which tried the insurgent soldiers of the Semyonovsky Regiment, and a member of the Committee of Enquiry in the Decembrist affair.

[6] Illarion Vasilchikov (1776-1847)—adjutant-general, then commander of the Guards Corps stationed in the capital.

[7] Ivan Vadkovsky, commander of the 1st Battalion of the Semyonovsky Regiment. He was brought to trial on the charge of involvement in inciting the soldiers of his battalion.

From the Reminiscences of Ivan Yakushkin on the Moscow Congress of 1821 and the Dissolution of the Union of Welfare

[1] The text of the reminiscences of Ivan Yakushkin about this event is taken from the publication *Notes, Articles and Letters of the Decembrist Yakushkin*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1951, p. 43 (in Russian).

[2] Pavel Grabbe and Ivan Burtsov—members of the Union of Welfare.

[3] Konstantin Okhotnikov—a member of the Union of Welfare.

[4] This plan was never carried out.

[5] Burtsov was unable to carry through this plan, that is, to create a new cell of the Secret Society in the south of Russia, isolating Pestel from the Society. The authority and influence of Pestel were so great that the members of the Tulchin branch of the Union of Welfare, who met in March 1821 in Tulchin, unanimously elected him the head of the new Southern Society.

[6] The St Petersburg members who founded the Northern Society included Nikita Muravyov, Nikolai Turgenev, Sergei Trubetskoy, Yevgenii Obolensky, Mikhail Lunin and Pyotr Lopukhin. The Northern Society was created in March-April 1821, and its organisation had been completed by the beginning of 1822.

From "A Brief Description of Various Secret Societies Whose Real Or Fictitious Existence Was Discovered by the Committee of Enquiry". Societies Which Emerged after the Dissolution of the Union of Welfare

[1] The text of the above is taken from the original kept in the USSR Central State Archives of the October Revolution, Fund No. 48, File No. 332-a, pp. 3-5.

Nikolai Lorer. "Reminiscences of Pestel"

[1] This extract from the reminiscences of Lorer about Pestel is taken from the publication *Notes of the Decembrist N. Lorer*, Irkutsk, 1984, pp. 63-72 (in Russian).

[2] In the spring of 1824, Pestel went to St Petersburg, where he held talks with Nikita Muravyov, Yevgenii Obolensky and Kondratii Ryleyev, the leaders of the Northern Society, on its unification with the Southern Society.

[3] Pestel made his first rough draft of his Constitution in 1820, when he wrote his "Notes on State Rule". In 1822 he drew up his first version of the *Russkaya Pravda* (Russian Law), which was discussed at one of the congresses of the Southern Society—in January 1823 in Kiev. In 1824 the second version of the project was drafted. Thus Pestel worked on his Draft Constitution not 12, but four to five years.

[4] Alexander Ypsilanti (1792-1833)—was a general with the Rus-

sian army and a Greek by nationality. In 1821 he led the Greek uprising in support of independence. Alexander I pointedly removed him from his position of general.

[5] Wallachia—the name given to modern Romania.

[6] Karl Nesselrode (1780-1862)—a count and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Alexander I and Nicholas I.

Pavel Pestel. "The Definition. Aim and Operation of 'Russkaya Pravda'" (Introduction to the Draft Constitution)

[1] Pestel named his Draft Constitution the *Russkaya Pravda* (Russian Law) in honour of a Russian medieval legal document. According to Pestel's plans, his *Russkaya Pravda* was to incorporate ten chapters. Only five chapters of this draft, and a brief summary entitled "Constitution—State Behest", have come down to us. The text of the introductory section to *Russkaya Pravda* quoted below is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. VII, Moscow, 1958, pp. 119-120 (in Russian).

[2] In 1905-1907 the first bourgeois-democratic revolution took place in Russia.

Nikita Muravyov about His Membership of the Secret Society. From His Testimony to the Committee of Enquiry, 5 January 1826

[1] The text of the testimony of Muravyov is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, p. 294 (in Russian).

[2] "The proclamations by the allied powers"—Russia, Austria and Prussia who, in 1813, set up an alliance against Napoleon.

From the Draft Constitution by Nikita Muravyov

[1] The text is taken from the book by N. Druzhinin, *The Decembrist Nikita Muravyov*, Moscow, 1933, pp. 321-336 (in Russian).

Alexander Muravyov about His Brother, Nikita Muravyov. From His Recollections

[1] Quoted below is an extract from "My Journal", containing the recollections of Alexander Muravyov. The text is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 126-127 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 and the retreat of the Russian army during the first stage of the war.

[3] Alexander Suvorov (1729-1800)—a renowned Russian military leader, Count of Rymnik, Prince of Italy, Generalissimo.

[4] Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826)—a Russian writer, publisher and historian. The reference here is to his major work, the 12-volume *History of the Russian State* (published between 1818 and 1829). Nikita Muravyov, Mikhail Orlov, Nikolai Turgenev and others produced critiques of Karamzin's conception, which defended the autocracy.

Nikolai Bestuzhev about Kondratii Ryleyev. From His Recollections

[1] The text of the recollections of Nikolai Bestuzhev is taken from the publication *The Reminiscences of the Bestuzhevs*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1951, pp. 7-24 (in Russian).

[2] *Reflections*—an anthology of historical and patriotic verse by Kondratii Ryleyev.

[3] "Satire on the Favourite" by Ryleyev was printed at the end of 1820. Although the identity of the person to whom this satire was addressed was disguised under the name of Rubellius, a favourite in Ancient Rome, and Ryleyev declared that he had merely "rendered" the satire by the Roman poet Persius, everyone realised that the satire was aimed at the "favourite" Arakcheyev. Ryleyev's friends expected that "thunder-bolts would rain down on the bold poet", but Arakcheyev decided not to recognise himself in the satire, "and the storm passed by".

[4] A reference to the case brought against some peasants of Count Razumovsky in 1822 in the criminal court in St Petersburg. As a member of the court, Ryleyev acted as counsel for the defence for the peasants.

[5] Thomas Moore (1779-1852)—an English romantic poet. Here the reference is to his work *The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of His Life* (1830).

Ivan Pushchin. "Notes on Pushkin"

[1] These extracts from the *Notes on Pushkin* by Pushchin are taken from the publication I. Pushchin. *Notes on Pushkin. Letters*, Moscow, 1979, pp. 62-64 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to a semi-legal pre-Decembrist organisation—a circle of friends known as the Holy Club (1814-1817), with which Pushkin had connections.

[3] Pushkin's poem "The Village", the ode "Liberty" (or "Ode to Freedom") and the epigramme on Alexander I "Hurrah! The roving despot comes riding into Russia..." expressed angry protest against the arbitrary behaviour of the landowners and the autocratic power of the tsar.

[4] Tsarskoye Selo—one of the residences of the Russian emperors, situated 27 km outside St Petersburg (now the town of Pushkin). Here, in 1811, a Lyceum (high school and college attended only

by selected children of the aristocracy), was established which both Pushkin and Pushchin attended.

[5] Alexander Kunitsyn (1783-1840)—professor of law, taught at the Lyceum at Tsarskoye Selo and at St Petersburg University. His two-volume *Natural Law*, written in the spirit of the Enlightenment, came out between 1818 and 1820.

[6] Anton Delvig (1798-1831)—a Russian poet and publisher and a friend of Pushkin.

[7] To begin with, Pushkin was exiled to Odessa for his free-thinking poetry. There he was under the surveillance of the Novorossiisk and Bessarabian Governor-General, Mikhail Vorontsov. Later he was sent to his father's estate in the village of Mikhailovskoye in Pskov Gubernia, where he was placed under police surveillance, and there he spent two years (1824-1826).

[8] The causes of the "dispute" between Pushkin and Vorontsov are still questioned to this day.

[9] Arina Rodionovna.

[10] Pavel Annenkov (1812-1887)—a Russian author and literary critic. He prepared for print the first edition of the works of Pushkin in seven volumes (St Petersburg, 1855-1857).

[11] A reference to the trial of Vladimir Rayevsky, which lasted from 1822 to 1827. Arrested on a charge of anti-government agitation among the soldiers, Rayevsky was subjected to innumerable interrogations with the purpose of obtaining information about the Secret Society and its members. Rayevsky named no one.

[12] A famous comedy by Alexander Griboyedov.

[13] *Chetyi-Minei* (Monthly Readings)—a collection of the lives of the saints compiled according to the months in which their feast days are celebrated by the Orthodox Church. It was composed in the 16th century.

[14] Pyotr Engelgardt (1775-1862)—director of the Lyceum at Tsarskoye Selo from 1816 to 1822.

[15] "Court page"—a reference to the minor court position which Nicholas I gave to Pushkin and which the poet clearly found burdensome.

[16] Here Pushchin is mistaken. Pushkin died on 29 January 1837. His funeral service, which Rosenberg attended, was held on 1 February. Rosenberg could not have returned to Petrovsky Zavod, where Pushchin was serving his sentence, earlier than the end of February or beginning of March.

[17] A reference to the anonymous letters sent to Pushkin, in which he was told of an alleged affair between his wife and the adopted son of the Dutch ambassador to Russia Dantes. Pushkin challenged Dantes to a duel. The court camarilla was involved in this malicious baiting of the great poet.

[18] In his reminiscences, Ivan Pushchin speaks of a frivolous "prank" by Pushkin, about which he was told by the poet's father. "This meeting [with Pushkin's father.—*Comp.*], purely accidental," writes Pushchin, "produced its impression: the thought of Pushkin's acceptance [into the Secret Society.—*Comp.*] disappeared from my mind." However, this, of course, was not the main reason.

Pushkin's friends, having doomed themselves "to certain death", did not want to subject the great poet to a similar fate. Moreover, Pushkin was under police surveillance, and therefore it would have been dangerous to take him into the Secret Society.

From "A Brief Description of Various Secret Societies Whose Real Or Fictitious Existence Was Discovered by the Committee of Enquiry". The Society of Associated Slavs

[1] Part of the text of this description is taken from archive material kept in the USSR Central State Archives of the October Revolution, Fund No. 48, File No. 332-a, p. 7.

[2] Borisov-2—Pyotr Borisov. At the time it was accepted procedure to use numbers to distinguish individuals serving in the army and having the same surname.

[3] Bohemia and Moravia—modern Czechoslovakia; Dalmatia and Croatia—modern Croatia, part of the People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; Transylvania—now the northern part of Romania.

[4] The Dalmatian Sea—The Adriatic.

[5] The Oath and the Slavic Catechism—programme documents of the Society of Associated Slavs. The "Oath" was administered to new members of the Secret Society: the new member swore on his sword to struggle against "tyranny" and in support of "freedom, so priceless to the human race", and promised "to be faithful to his duty" and to rigorously preserve the secrecy of the Society. The Catechism or Rules of the Secret Society contained 17 points which set forth the programme of moral self-improvement for the members of the Society, and the final aim of liquidating social estates and "social-estate prejudices", establishing universal equality and creating a union of democratic Slav republics. These documents contained more than a little naivety and utopianism, which distinguished them from the draft constitutions of Pestel and Muravyov, both elaborated carefully and in detail.

Pyotr Borisov on the Emergence of the Society of Associated Slavs. From His Testimony Before the Committee of Enquiry

[1] The text of the testimony given by Pyotr Borisov to the Committee of Enquiry is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. V, Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, pp. 31-32, 52-54 (in Russian).

[2] The Pythagorean sect. A reference to a religious confraternity founded in the 6th century B.C. by the Ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras. Its aim was religious and moral self-improvement; it preached asceticism and universal equality. The ideals of the Pythagorean confraternity impressed the founders of the Society of Associated Slavs.

[3] A reference to the elder brother of Pyotr Borisov—Andrei (1798-1854), a retired second lieutenant and one of the founders

and leaders of the Society of Associated Slavs. He received the same sentence as his younger brother.

[4] The Republic of the philosopher Plato—a reference to the theory of the Ancient Greek philosopher, Plato (5th century B. C.) of an ideal republican state embodying and implementing man's natural right to freedom, equality and fraternity.

[5] Julian Lublinski (1798-1873)—one of the founders of the Society of Associated Slavs, he also took part in the Polish student movement. The Supreme Criminal Court which tried the Decembrists sentenced him to six years' penal servitude to be followed by permanent exile.

[6] A reference to the confederation of Greek city-states led by Athens in the 5th century B.C.

[7] Alexei Tiutchev (1802-1856)—a captain, born into the landless nobility, and a member of the Society of Associated Slavs. The court sentenced him to penal servitude for life, which was commuted to 20 years, followed by exile for life.

Ivan Gorbachevsky. "On the Unification of the Society of Associated Slavs with the Southern Society"

[1] The text of these recollections is taken from the publication: I. Gorbachevsky. *Notes, Letters*, Moscow, 1963, pp. 18-28 (in Russian).

[2] "The constitution which involved forms of republican government for Russia and which had received the approval of many renowned publicists, English, French and German". The young, enthusiastic Bestuzhev-Riumin is here clearly exaggerating. In reality the situation was as follows: the Decembrists requested Count Héraclius Polignac, who was returning to France, to acquaint the members of French secret societies with the content of the *Russkaya Pravda* by Pestel. With this aim in view, a synopsis of this document was translated into French by Sergei Muravyov-Apostol.

[3] Alexander Pestov (1803-1883)—a member of the Society of Associated Slavs.

[4] A reference to a summary of Pestel's *Russkaya Pravda* entitled "Constitution—State Behest", whose contents Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin transmitted to the Society of Associated Slavs.

[5] The reference is to Sergei Muravyov-Apostol.

[6] Here we find a list of certain members of the Southern Society. Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin, wishing to attribute greater weight and significance to his society in the eyes of the Associated Slavs, named among the members of the Southern Society such people as General Nikolai Rayevsky (a renowned hero of the war against Napoleon in 1812), and General Pavel Kisselyov (chief of Headquarters of the 2nd Army stationed in the south of Russia). They were not members of the Southern Society, although they knew of its existence.

[7] The Polish Patriotic Society was founded in 1821. Its aim was

to achieve independence for Poland, which she had lost in 1795. In 1823 this Society entered into contact with the Southern Society of Decembrists.

[8] Galitia—that part of the Ukraine which lies west of the Carpathian Mountains and which was then part of the Austrian Empire; "the province of Poznan"—the western part of Poland, which was then part of the Kingdom of Prussia.

[9] S. Kryzanowski, P. Moszynski and A. Jablonowski—members of the Polish Patriotic Society.

[10] This was the name given to troops consisting mainly of Poles. The commander of the Lithuanian Corps was the tsar's plenipotentiary representative in Poland (by the decision of the Vienna Congress of 1814-1815 the Kingdom of Poland was under the rule of the Russian tsar), Grand Prince Constantine. At the beginning of 1825 the Society of Military Friends was formed within this corps. It is to this, no doubt, that Gorbachevsky is referring.

[11] Endor—the name of the place where Saul, in disguise, went to see a woman with a divining spirit to learn of the outcome of his forthcoming war with the Philistines (having himself banished all magicians from his kingdom). At first she refused, as the king had prohibited soothsaying, but then, on his request, summoned the spirit of Samuel, who told him that he and his sons would perish and Israel be delivered to the Philistines. (*Translator's note*—as, in the text, mention is made of a rod, I think this may be, in fact, a reference to Aaron's sacred rod, which turned into a snake when he threw it on the ground before the Pharaoh, showing that he could work the same magic as the Pharaoh's magicians. Cf. Exodus, Ch. 7, vv. 8-12.)

The Speech Delivered by Bestuzhev-Riumin at a Meeting of the Members of the Society of Associated Slavs, 13 September 1825. From the Testimony of Bestuzhev-Riumin

[1] Talks on the unification of the Southern Society with the Society of Associated Slavs were held from 5 to 13 September 1825. The Southern Society was represented by Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin. The speech quoted below is the one he delivered at the last meeting on 13 September. The text of the speech is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. IX, Moscow, 1950, p. 381 (in Russian).

Pavel Pestel on the Plans for an Armed Uprising and Coup d'État. From the Testimony of Pavel Pestel

[1] The text of Pestel's testimony is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. IV, Moscow-Leningrad, 1927, pp. 102-104 (in Russian).

[2] Pestel sees the Southern and Northern Decembrist Societies as a continuation of the Union of Welfare, and as its two sections.

[3] The son of Nicholas I and future Alexander II.

Sergei Volkonsky on Government Surveillance of the Secret Society

[1] The text of the reminiscences of Volkonsky is taken from the publication *The Notes of Sergei Volkonsky*, St Petersburg, 1902, pp. 386-416 (in Russian).

[2] Vasilii Davydov (1792-1855)—a retired colonel, member of the Southern Society and a leader of one of its branches—the Kamenka Board. The court sentenced him to death, which was commuted to penal servitude for life.

[3] The first report on the Secret Society was made by A. Boshnyak to Witt on 3 August 1825. With this report, Witt left to see Alexander I on 18 October at Taganrog (where the tsar was resident at that time). Witt's journey to Taganrog provoked suspicion among the leaders of the Southern Society.

[4] The first man to report against the Decembrists, Ivan Sherwood, a junior officer serving in the southern military settlements, was not one of Witt's agents.

[5] Vadkovsky was arrested on 13 December 1825 in Kursk.

[6] Kits and munitions for the troops were obtained from a military commissariat in Moscow.

[7] Elizavetgrad—a town in the south of the Ukraine, now called Kirovograd, a regional centre.

[8] Arkadii Maiboroda never met either Boshnyak or Witt.

[9] Maiboroda's report was received in Taganrog on 1 December 1825 by Ivan Dibich, the chief of General Headquarters, who sent to St Petersburg a comprehensive account of the conspiracy in the south of Russia on the basis of this report and information received from others.

[10] A. Chernyshev, Pavel Kisselyov and Arkadii Maiboroda arrived in Tulchin on 12 December 1825. The following day, the eve of the insurrection in St Petersburg, Pavel Pestel and A. Yushnevsky, leaders of the Southern Society, were arrested. The investigation had begun.

[11] The statements of Maiboroda were handed to the Committee of Enquiry in Tulchin on 22 December 1825.

[12] Pavel Kisselyov (1788-1872)—chief-of-staff of the 2nd Army. Alexander I suspected him of being involved in the Decembrist conspiracy.

[13] Alexander I received his first report on the Secret Society in May 1821.

Yevgenii Obolensky. From "Reminiscences about Kondratii Ryleyev"

[1] The text of the reminiscences of Obolensky is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 79-80 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to the fact that, in the spring of 1821, the Russian Guards Corps marched to the western borders of Russia in connec-

tion with the revolutionary events of 1820-1821 in Naples and Piedmont. The corps was ordered to halt in the Byelorussian town of Beshenkovichi, from whence, at the beginning of 1822, it returned to the Russian capital.

[3] A poem by Ryleyev dedicated to the Ukrainian Cossack leader, Andrei Voinarovsky, exiled in 1718 for involvement in a conspiracy against Peter I.

[4] The Supreme Duma—the governing organ of the Northern Society.

[5] The Russo-American Company—a Russian merchant trading company founded in 1799 in North America. Kondratii Ryleyev held the post of superintendent of the company from 1824.

[6] Nikolai Grech (1787-1867)—a Russian journalist, writer and publisher. He was on close terms with the Decembrists. Later he became famous as the publisher of the reactionary newspaper *Severnaya Pchela* (Northern Bee).

[7] Alexander of Wurtemberg (1771-1833)—a duke and a general in the cavalry, chief of communications, and a relative of the tsar.

[8] Alexander Kornilovich (1800-1834)—a member of the Southern Society, sentenced to 15 years' penal servitude. He became famous for his historical works on the period of Peter I.

[9] Wilhelm Küchelbecker, a Decembrist and poet.

[10] Faddei Bulgarin (1789-1859)—a Russian journalist and writer. He was on intimate terms with Ryleyev and Griboyedov. Later, together with Nikolai Grech, he published the newspaper *Severnaya Pchela.*

[11] *Polyarnaya Zvezda* (Polar Star)—an almanac published by K. Ryleyev and A. Bestuzhev between 1823 and 1825, with contributions by the famous Russian poets Pushkin, Zhukovsky, Griboyedov and Krylov. Herzen and Ogarev named their own almanac (1855-1868) in its honour.

[12] Karl Sand—a German student who, in 1819, killed A. Kotsebu, a publisher of reactionary journals and an agent of the Holy Alliance. Sand was seized at the scene of the crime, tried and executed. In Decembrist circles, Sand's action won warm approval.

II. "The First Breath of Freedom"

Sergei Trubetskoy on the Interregnum in November-December 1825. From the Reminiscences of Sergei Trubetskoy

[1] Taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 35-42 (in Russian).

[2] Trubetskoy is referring to the demagogic promises made by Alexander I to grant the nations "lawful democratic institutions", promises which he made in many of his speeches, including those delivered during the Vienna Congress in 1815.

[3] A reference to the speech delivered by Alexander I at the opening of the Polish Seym in Warsaw on 15 March, 1818.

[4] Pyotr Lopukhin (1783-1827)—chairman of the State Council;

Alexei Kurakin (1759-1829)—Minister of the Interior. In June 1826, Lopukhin was appointed chairman of the Supreme Criminal Court which tried the Decembrists, while Kurakin was appointed his deputy.

[5] A reference to Grand Prince Constantine's renunciation in 1822 (on the insistence of Alexander I) of his right to succeed to the Russian throne following his morganatic marriage. In 1820 Constantine married a Polish lady of the court, Iohanna Grudzinska, who did not belong to the nobility but who was then given the title of Princess Lovich.

[6] "The Russian sovereign could not dispose of the succession to the throne as he willed." Miloradovich viewed Grand Prince Constantine's loss of the right to succeed to the throne and its transference to Nicholas as a violation of the law of succession issued in 1797 by Pavel I which stated that the succession was to pass solely through the male line—from father to son—and, in the absence of a legitimate male heir, to the oldest brother; this procedure could not be thereafter modified by any behest of a ruling emperor.

[7] Alexander Golitsyn (1773-1842)—a member of the State Council and senior procurator (chairman) of the supreme ecclesiastical office, the Holy Synod. In 1825-1826 he was a member of the Commission of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair.

[8] Nikolai Mordvinov (1754-1845)—an admiral and a member of the State Council. Known for his moderate liberal views, he enjoyed considerable authority in progressive public circles thanks to the independence of his thought. The Decembrists had planned to make him a member of the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

[9] "A Polish woman of humble origin". A reference to Iohanna Grudzinska.

[10] Nicholas was born on 26 June 1796, that is, before his father, Pavel I, had succeeded to the throne; Mikhail was born in 1798, when Pavel I was already emperor.

Nikolai Bestuzhev on Preparations for the Insurrection on 14 December 1825. From His Reminiscences.

[1] This account is taken from the publication *The Reminiscences of the Bestuzhevs*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1951 (in Russian).

[2] Konstantin Torson (1790-1852)—a lieutenant-captain in the navy, he fought in the Napoleonic war of 1812 and took part in a voyage round the world in 1819-1821. One of the islands discovered during this voyage is named after him. As a member of the Northern Society and an active participant in the insurrection of 14 December, Torson was sentenced to penal servitude for an unlimited period, commuted to 20 years and subsequent exile in Siberia.

[3] Gavriil Batenkov (1793-1863)—a lieutenant-colonel in the Corps of Railway Engineers, he fought in the Napoleonic war of 1812. He served under Arakcheyev and Speransky, and took part in the insurrection on 14 December. Sentenced to "permanent

penal servitude", commuted to 20 years, Batenkov spent 20 years in solitary confinement in a cell in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress, and then, in 1846, was exiled to Tomsk.

Brother Alexander—the younger brother of Nikolai Bestuzhev.

[4] Yakov Rostovtsev (1803-1860)—a second lieutenant in the Guards Regiment of the Chasseurs. He had links with the Decembrists and knew of the plans for an insurrection, on which he reported on 12 December 1825, to Grand Prince Nicholas, the claimant to the Russian throne.

[5] On 12 December 1825, Grand Prince Nicholas had already issued instructions for the arrest of those named in the report by Maiboroda.

[6] Nikolai Repin (1792-1831)—a staff-captain in the Life-Guards of the Finlandsky Regiment and a member of both the Northern and Southern Decembrist Societies. He was sentenced to 10 years' penal servitude to be followed by exile in Siberia.

[7] Anton Arbuzov (1798-1843)—a lieutenant in the navy; Alexander Sutgof (1801-1872)—a lieutenant in the Royal Grenadier Regiment. Both took an active part in the insurrection of 14 December and were sentenced to death, commuted to penal servitude for an unlimited period.

[8] The Hermitage—the name given to the extension added to the Winter Palace between 1775 and 1784 and which served as an art gallery. Today the entire complex of buildings, including the Winter Palace—now a museum—is called the Hermitage.

Kondratii Ryleyev about Preparations for the Insurrection on 14 December 1825. From His Testimony Before the Committee of Enquiry

[1] The testimony of Kondratii Ryleyev about the meetings of the Secret Society at his apartment on the eve of the insurrection is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, pp. 183-185 (in Russian).

[2] Countess Alexandra Lavalle—the mother-in-law of Sergei Trubetskoy, who had arrived in St Petersburg from Kiev a few weeks before the insurrection on 14 December 1825, and who lived at the Lavalle home.

[3] The Grand Council—the constituent assembly which, according to Decembrist plans, was to be convened three months after the uprising.

[4] Should the uprising fail, the Decembrists planned to retreat to the Novgorod military settlements, which began approximately 100 km from St Petersburg. Aware of the considerable discontent among the inhabitants of the military settlements (which was later revealed in the uprising in 1831), the Decembrists hoped for their support.

Mikhail Lunin. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev.

Pavel Pestel. Drawing by his mother

Alexander Bestuzhev. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Pyotr Borisov. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Pyotr Kakhovsky. Miniature painted in the 1920's

Vladimir Rayevsky. Photograph taken in 1869

Yakov Andreyevich

Mikhail Fonvizin. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Nikolai Turgenev. Lithographic print. Paris, 1801

Ivan Yakushkin. Portrait in watercolours by N. Utkin. 1916

Sergei Trubetskoy. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. Painted by N. Utkin. 1823

Nikolai Lorer. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Nikita Muravyov. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Alexander Muravyov. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev.

Nikolai Bestuzhev. Self-portrait

Ivan Pushchin. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Ivan Gorbachevsky. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin. Drawing by A. Ivanovsky

Sergei Volkonsky. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Yevgenii Obolensky. By an unknown artist. 1820's

Kondratii Ryleyev. Miniature painted in the 1920's

Andrei Rozen. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Vladimir Steingel. Autolithograph by O. Oesterreich. 1823

Mikhail Bestuzhev. Painted by N. Bestuzhev

Nikolai Basargin. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Pyotr Yakubovich. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Maria Volkonskaya with her son. Portrait in watercolours by P. Sokolov

Ivan Annenkov. Painted by N. Bestuzhev

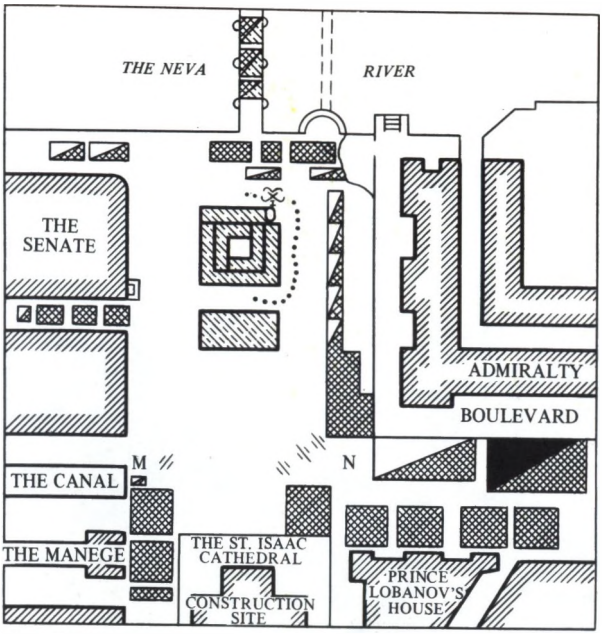
Mikhail Küchelbecker. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Alexandra Muravyova. Painted by N. Bestuzhev

Yekaterina Trubetskaya. Miniature by N. Bestuzhev. 1828

Camilla le Dantu Ivashova. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev

Pauline Annenkova. Portrait in watercolours by N. Bestuzhev



LEGEND

- Infantry of the insurgent troops
- Infantry of the neutral troops
- Infantry of the government troops
- Cavalry
- Artillery
- Four light cannon of the Ist Company of the Ist Household Guards Artillery Battery
- N — Emperor Nicholas I
- M — Grand Prince Mikhail Pavlovich
- Monument to Peter I

Disposition of the insurgent troops and the Guards Corps on Senate Square. 14 December 1825

Cell of a Decembrist. Watercolour by N. Bestuzhev

View of Petrovsky Zavod. N. Bestuzhev at the easel. The prison is seen in the centre

Front-cover of A. Herzen's almanac *Polyarnaya Zvezda*

Sergei Trubetskoyon the Plan of the Insurrection and Preparations for It. From the Testimony of S. Trubetskoy

[1] Here Sergei Trubetskoy explains the reasons for his non-appearance on 14 December 1825, on Senate Square. The text of the testimony is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, pp. 36-38 (in Russian).

[2] Trubetskoy is referring to Alexander Yakubovich, who had volunteered in the summer of 1825 to assassinate Alexander I, and to Pyotr Kakhovsky, who pledged to kill Nicholas I at the beginning of the insurrection.

Manifesto to the Russian People

[1] This Manifesto, which was to be proclaimed by the Senate to the people on the day of the insurrection, was compiled by S. Trubetskoy and V. Steingel. The published text is the rough draft of the Manifesto (its final variant was destroyed by Steingel after the defeat of the insurrection). It was discovered during a search of Trubetskoy's apartment. The text is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. 1, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, pp. 107-108 (in Russian).

[2] "The abolition of the right of ownership of people"—a demand for the abolition of serfdom.

[3] Poll-tax—a tax introduced by Peter I on each "male soul". The nobility and the clergy were exempt from this tax.

[4] Military levy—a form of conscription to supplement the ranks of the Russian army. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the peasants, the lower classes in the towns, and other non-privileged classes were obliged to supply a fixed number of recruits.

[5] A reference to the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Andrei Rozen on the Insurrection of 14 December 1825. From His Reminiscences

[1] A member of the Northern Society, a lieutenant with the Life-Guards of the Finlandsky Regiment, Andrei Rozen was with his regiment on the Isaakiyevsky Bridge on the day of the insurrection, 14 December 1825. On that day, the Finlandsky Regiment adopted a neutral position, neither joining the insurgents, nor going over to the side of the government troops. In his reminiscences, Rozen describes the behaviour of his regiment, the mood of the soldiers and the officers on the day of the insurrection. The text is taken from the publication A. Rozen, *Notes of a Decembrist*, Irkutsk, 1984, pp. 123-131 (in Russian).

[2] Mikhail Orlov (1788-1842)—major-general, member of the Union of Welfare and leader of the Kishinev organisation of the Decembrists. During the interregnum in 1825, the members of the

Northern Society counted on the arrival of Orlov in St Petersburg in order to entrust to him command of the insurgent troops. Thanks to the intervention of his younger brother, Alexei Orlov, a favourite of Nicholas I, Mikhail Orlov was not brought to trial: Nicholas I contented himself with sending Orlov into exile to his native village.

[3] Galernaya Harbour—in the south-western part of St Petersburg, on the banks of the Gulf of Finland.

[4] Vasilyevsky Island—in the western part of St Petersburg, the largest island in the Neva delta.

[5] The battalion of the Guards Naval Crew, brought out onto Senate Square by Nikolai Bestuzhev and Anton Arbuzov, numbered 1,100 sailors and 12 officers.

[6] Altogether, 3,020 soldiers and sailors took part in the insurrection on 14 December 1825.

[7] Admiralteiskaya Square was adjacent to Senate Square and located in front of the Admiralty building (today the Alexandrovsky Gardens occupy this spot). Dvortsovaya [Palace.—*Comp.*] Square—in front of the Winter Palace—adjoined Admiralteiskaya Square on the eastern side.

[8] Karl Tol (1777-1849)—lieutenant-general, conducted the first interrogations of the arrested Decembrists prior to the creation, on 17 December 1825, of the Committee of Enquiry.

From the Reminiscences of Vladimir Steingel

[1] The text is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 221-224 (in Russian).

[2] "The two Bestuzhevs"—the brothers Alexander and Mikhail Bestuzhev.

[3] "The seven-year-old heir to the throne"—the son of Nicholas I, Grand Prince Alexander (born in 1818), and future Alexander II (1855-1881).

[4] Historical research has shown that Alexander Yakubovich was sent by the insurgents "to reconnoitre", in order to discover the situation in the government camp. Yakubovich had the opportunity to meet with Nicholas himself, and falsely promised him that he would "persuade the rebels". On returning to the battle-square of rebellious troops, he told his companions: "Stand firm, they are mighty afraid of you!" and thereby encouraged the insurgents. At the very beginning of the investigation into the Decembrists, the emperor appreciated the role played by Yakubovich in the insurrection, and the purpose of his "mission". As Nicholas himself later recalled, the "true intent" of Yakubovich was "to learn what was going on among us and act accordingly". Yakubovich was sentenced to death, commuted to penal servitude for life.

[5] *Mnemosina*—a literary almanac published in 1824-1825 by Wilhelm Küchelbecker and Vladimir Odoyevsky.

[6] As a result of the construction of the new St. Isaac Cathedral,

all the internal fittings from the old church had been transferred to the Admiralty building, where a temporary church had been set up.

[7] "Another Küchelbecker"—Mikhail Küchelbecker (1798-1859), younger brother of Wilhelm Küchelbecker, a lieutenant in the navy. Mikhail Küchelbecker, like his elder brother, was tried for his part in the insurrection and sentenced to 10 years' penal servitude to be followed by "exile in perpetuity".

[8] On 14 December Alexei Orlov was in command of the Horse Guards and was given the title of count as a reward for his services to Nicholas I in helping to suppress the insurrection. Later he became the chief-of-police and head of the III Department (secret police) under Nicholas I.

[9] V. Steingel recalls that the reign of Alexander I began with the murder of his father, Pavel I, and concluded with the Decembrist uprising. In the first instance, it was a case of an "evil deed unpunished", in the second—"merciless vengeance on a necessary and noble uprising".

From the Reminiscences of Mikhail Bestuzhev

[1] The text of the reminiscences of Mikhail Bestuzhev about the day of the insurrection on 14 December is taken from the publication *The Reminiscences of the Bestuzhevs*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1951 (in Russian).

[2] Alexander Chevkin—a second lieutenant with the Life-Guards of the Horse Regiment.

[3] "Support hurried to our assistance"—a reference to the fact that the soldiers of the Royal Grenadiers Regiment and the sailors of the Guards Naval Crew joined the Moscow Regiment.

From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Bestuzhev

[1] This extract from the reminiscences of Nikolai Bestuzhev about the tragic concluding moments of the insurrection on 14 December is taken from the publication *The Reminiscences of the Bestuzhevs*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1951 (in Russian).

From the "Notes" of Nicholas I about 14 December 1825

[1] The text of the reminiscences of Nicholas I about the 14 December 1825, is taken from the publication *The Interregnum of 1825 and the Decembrist Insurrection in the Correspondence and Memoirs of Members of the Imperial Family*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, pp. 21-28 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to the Manifesto of 12 December 1825, on the succession of Nicholas I.

[3] Master of the Imperial Stables—one of the highest court officials.

[4] Here Nicholas I is propagating the version according to which the insurgent soldiers called the wife of Grand Prince Constantine "Constitution".

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. "The Insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment." From His Reminiscences.

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Southern Society*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 191-196 (in Russian).

[2] Anastasii Kuzmin (?-1826)—a member of the Society of Associated Slavs, he committed suicide during the suppression of the mutiny of the Chernigovsky Regiment.

[3] Mikhail Shchepillo (?-1826), Veniamin Solovyov (1798-1871), Ivan Sukhinov (1797-1828)—members of the Society of Associated Slavs, took part in the mutiny of the Chernigovsky Regiment. Shchepillo was killed during the suppression of the mutiny; Sukhinov and Solovyov were sentenced to "penal servitude in perpetuity". In 1828 Sukhinov tried to organise an escape. The conspiracy was discovered and Sukhinov, condemned to death, killed himself.

[4] The chaplain of the Chernigovsky Regiment, Daniil Kaiser, conducted the service for the insurgents. For this he was defrocked and sentenced to penal labour with convict labour gangs.

[5] Hyppolite Muravyov-Apostol (1806-1826)—a lieutenant with the quartermaster unit, the younger brother of Matvei and Sergei Muravyov-Apostol. He died during the suppression of the mutiny of the Chernigovsky Regiment.

Ivan Gorbachevsky. "The Insurrection of the Chernigovsky Regiment". From His "Notes"

[1] The memoir-style *Notes* of Ivan Gorbachevsky were written in the middle of the 1840's, when Gorbachevsky was in exile. They describe the history of the Society of Associated Slavs and the mutiny of the Chernigovsky Regiment. In addition to his personal recollections, Gorbachevsky gives accounts by other Decembrists. This extract from Gorbachevsky's *Notes* is taken from the publication I. Gorbachevsky. *Notes, Letters*, Moscow, 1963, pp. 36-101 (in Russian).

[2] Artamon Muravyov (1794-1846)—a colonel, commander of the Akhtyrsky Regiment and a member of the Southern Society. At the decisive moment he refused to bring out his regiment. Nonetheless he was sentenced to death for his membership of the Secret Society, a sentence later commuted to penal servitude for an unlimited period.

[3] Alexander Vadkovsky (1801-?)—a member of the Southern Society, younger brother of Fyodor Vadkovsky (1800-1840). He was punished without trial—imprisoned for four months in a fortress, and then sent on active military service to the Caucasus.

[1] Nikolai Ogaryov (1813-1876)—Russian revolutionary democrat, poet and publicist, a friend of Alexander Herzen.

[2] The free Russian press of A. Herzen abroad—a reference to the almanacs *Polar Star* (1855-1869). *Voices from Russia* (1856-1860), *Historical Collections* (1859-1861) and *Memoirs of the Decembrists* (1861-1863), and the newspaper *The Bell* (1857-1868) and others, published by Herzen.

Mikhail Fonvizin on the Enquiry into the Decembrists' Affair and Their Trial From "A Review of the Manifestations of Political Life in Russia"

[1] The text of the account is taken from the publication M. Fonvizin. *Essays and Letters*, Vol. 2, Irkutsk, 1982, pp. 194-198 (in Russian).

[2] The text of the Report to Nicholas I by the Committee of Enquiry, dated 30 May 1826, was drawn up by an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dmitrii Bludov (1785-1864); subsequently D. Bludov was appointed minister of the interior and chairman of the State Council.

[3] A reference to judge Jeffries, lord-chancellor and head of the royal court under King James II (1685-1688). Jeffries was notorious for his severity and violation of legal norms.

[4] Alexander Benkendorf (1782-1844)—adjutant-general, count and one of Nicholas' immediate entourage. Between 1826 and 1844 he was the head of the III Department and chief of the gendarmerie. In 1826 he was a member of the Committee of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair.

From the Reminiscences of Alexander Muravyov "My Journal"

[1] A. Muravyov wrote his reminiscences in 1852-1853, while in exile. These notes contain a vivid description of the enquiry and the trial of the Decembrists, and of their period in exile. The text is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 130-135 (in Russian).

[2] The foundations of the fortress were laid in 1703, and it was named the St. Petersburg Fortress in honour of St Peter, Peter I's patron saint. When, in 1717, the SS Peter and Paul Cathedral was built within the fortress walls, the fortress became known as the SS Peter and Paul Fortress.

[3] A reference to the elder brother of Alexander Muravyov—Nikita Muravyov.

[4] Mikhail Muravyov—senator, curator of the Moscow Educational District, father of the Decembrists Alexander and Nikita Muravyov.

[5] Pyotr Myslovsky (1772-1846)—archpriest of Kazansky Ca-

thedral, chaplain to the Decembrists in the SS Peter and Paul Fortress.

[6] The Committee of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair comprised: the Minister of War, Alexander Tatishchev; the Chief of General Staff, General Ivan Dibich; Military Governor-General of St Petersburg, Pavel Golenishchev-Kutuzov; Prince Alexander Golitsyn; Grand Prince Mikhail; and generals Alexei Potapov, Vasilii Levashov and Alexander Chernyshev.

[7] Pyotr Falenberg (1791-1873)—a member of the Southern Society. The documents of the enquiry testify that this was not a "false self-accusation" by Falenberg. By threats and blackmail the Committee of Enquiry obtained from him an admission to his genuine "intent to commit regicide".

[8] A reference to the conspiracy against Emperor Pavel I and his murder on 12 March 1801. A. Tatishchev and P. Golenishchev-Kutuzov, members of the Committee of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair, were involved in this conspiracy.

[9] Fyodor Shakhovskoy (1796-1829)—a member of the early Decembrist organisations. He was accused of having plotted, in 1817, to assassinate Alexander I. During the enquiry he categorically denied this charge. He was condemned to exile for life.

[10] Pavel Grabbe (1789-1875)—a member of the Union of Welfare. In 1822 he was exiled to Yaroslavl under police surveillance for belonging to this organisation. In 1826 he was summoned for the enquiry in the Decembrist affair.

[11] Zakhar Chernyshev (1722-1784)—count, fieldmarshal-general under Catherine II, grandfather of the Decembrist Zakhar Chernyshev (1796-1862).

[12] A reference to the division of the defendants according to the gravity of the offence and the sentence passed against them.

Nikolai Lorer on His Interrogation in the Winter Palace. From His Recollections

[1] The text of these recollections is taken from the publication *Notes of the Decembrist N. Lorer*, Irkutsk, 1984, pp. 86-90 (in Russian).

[2] Marshal of France, Michel Ney (1769-1815). Following the "hundred days" of Napoleon, he was sentenced by the Bourbons to be shot.

[3] A reference to Alexander Chernyshev—a member of the Committee of Enquiry.

[4] "Your former regimental commander is doomed." A reference to Pavel Pestel, commander of the Vyatsky Infantry Regiment in which Nikolai Lorer served.

[5] The Decembrist under investigation was given written "question points", in reply to which he made written statements known as "answer points".

[6] A reference to the fact that Nicholas I exiled to the Caucasus the famous Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov for his poem "On the Death of the Poet" (Alexander Pushkin).

From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin

[1] The text is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Southern Society*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 37-58 (in Russian).

[2] Basargin is referring to the activity of the so-called "Inspection Commission" of the Supreme Criminal Court which, on 8-9 June 1826, "inspected" the files on the Decembrists. This "inspection" merely took the form of summoning each of the defendants to appear before the Commission, which showed him his file and asked whether the statements and signature were in his hand, whether the statements had been made voluntarily, and whether he had had the opportunity to meet other defendants face to face. This was necessary in order to confirm that the statements were "genuine" and "voluntary". The defendant was then obliged to put his signature to this decision. The Inspection Commission was divided into three sections. The section to which Basargin was summoned comprised the generals K. Lambert and A. Chernyshev, senator I. Lavrov, and A. Balashov, member of the State Council.

[3] "The young Witgenstein"—Lev Witgenstein, son of Fieldmarshal Pyotr Witgenstein and member of the Union of Welfare. He was summoned during the enquiry, but, as the son of a fieldmarshal, was released with a "certificate of acquittal".

[4] Alexander Komarov—a lieutenant-colonel and member of the Union of Welfare. He was summoned during the enquiry into the Decembrist affair, and was then put under police surveillance.

[5] The reading of the sentence was attended by 68 members of the court.

[6] The glass—emblem of "legality" in tsarist courts. It consisted of a triangular prism surmounted by a two-headed eagle. On each side of the prism were inscribed the decrees of Peter I.

[7] "The year of trial"—a reference to the Crimean War of 1853-1856.

[8] Nicholas I died on 18 February 1855, when defeat in the Crimean War was already apparent. The sudden death of the tsar gave rise to rumours that he had committed suicide.

[9] The coronation of Nicholas I took place on 22 August 1826. The Coronation Manifesto issued on that day provided for only an insignificant reduction in the terms of penal servitude for the condemned Decembrists.

Decree to the Supreme Criminal Court, 10 July 1826

[1] On 8 July, the Supreme Criminal Court sent the sentences it had passed, presented in the form of a "report", to Nicholas I for his confirmation. The decree of the tsar, which was issued on 10 July, slightly reduced the sentences against the condemned. The text of the decree is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. XVII, Moscow, 1980, pp. 224-226 (in Russian).

[2] "4th class"—one of the military or civilian ranks in the Table

of Ranks (established by Peter I). Altogether, this table contained 14 ranks (or "classes").

[3] Collegiate assessor—a civilian rank in the Table of Ranks.

[4] Nikolai Turgenev, who was then living abroad, was condemned in his absence.

[5] Alexander Bestuzhev gave himself up the day after the insurrection.

[6] The "full confession" of Ivan Yakushkin was achieved by holding him for a considerable period of time in hand and leg irons.

From the Protocol of the Supreme Criminal Court of 11 July 1826

[1] On 11 July, the Supreme Criminal Court brought in its final decision on the fate of the five condemned Decembrists who were placed outside the categories. The text of the protocol is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. XVII, Moscow, 1980, p. 252 (in Russian).

Instructions of Nicholas I on the Ceremonial Execution of the Sentence Against the Decembrists

[1] Preparing to dispose of the Decembrists, Nicholas I also decided upon the ceremonial to be used. His instructions were given to Pavel Golenishchev-Kutuzov, Governor-General of St Petersburg and the man in charge of the execution of the sentence. The text of the document is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. XVII, Moscow, 1980, p. 280 (in Russian).

The Report of the Governor-General of St Petersburg, P. Golenishchev-Kutuzov, to Nicholas I Dated 13 July 1826, on the Execution of the Death Sentence Against P. Pestel, K. Ryleyev, S. Muravyov-Apostol, M. Bestuzhev-Riumin and P. Kakhovsky

[1] The text of the report is taken from the publication *The Decembrist Uprising. Documents*, Vol. XVII, Moscow, 1980, p. 252 (in Russian).

From the Reminiscences of Yevgenii Obolensky

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 94-96.

[2] Here Obolensky is referring to his summons to appear before the Inspection Commission of the Supreme Criminal Court on 8 June 1826.

[3] Obolensky is mistaken as to the date: the sentence of the court was read out to the defendants on 12, and not 9 July 1826.
[4] The senior procurator of the Supreme Criminal Court was Ivan Zhuravlyov, who took the minutes of the trial.

Alexander Herzen. From the Book "The Past and Reflections"

[1] The extract relating how the young Herzen reacted to the news of the execution of the Decembrists is taken from Herzen's book *The Past and Reflections*, Leningrad, 1947, p. 32 (in Russian).

Alexander Muravyov. "On the Departure of the Condemned Decembrists into Penal Servitude". From His Reminiscences

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 136-140 (in Russian).
[2] A reference to the wife of Nikita Muravyov—Alexandra (1804-1832), and her younger sister, Sophia.
[3] Ivan Annenkov (1802-1878)—a member of the Northern Society, condemned by the court to penal servitude for life.
[4] Coach and sledge drivers—in Russia, a category of peasants who, until the end of the 19th century, functioned as state employees conveying post and official persons.

From the "Notes" of Maria Volkonskaya

[1] The "Notes" (reminiscences) of Maria Volkonskaya were written in the form of letters to her eldest son, Mikhail. Her account of the wives of the Decembrists who voluntarily followed their husbands into exile is taken from the publication *The Notes of M. Volkonskaya*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 32-40, 50-55, 58-71 (in Russian).
[2] A relative of Maria Volkonskaya.
[3] Katasha—Yekaterina Trubetskaya (1800-1854), the wife of Sergei Trubetskoy.
[4] Zabaikalye—the southern part of Eastern Siberia, east of Lake Baikal.
[5] Factory serfs—a category of serfs assigned to work in state-owned factories.
[6] The Blagodatsky mine—one of the mining enterprises in the Nerchinsk mountain district beyond Lake Baikal. Many of the Decembrists condemned to penal servitude were sent here.
[7] Timofei Burnashev—head of the mines in the Nerchinsk mountain district, and notorious for his harsh treatment of prisoners.
[8] "My arrival and stay in Chita". In 1828 it was decided to bring all the Decembrists serving their sentences in the mines of the Nerchinsk district to Chita. Their wives also moved there.
[9] Alexandrina Muravyova—wife of Nikita Muravyov; Yelizaveta Naryshkina (1801-1867)—wife of the Decembrist Mikhail Narysh-

kin; Alexandra Yentaltseva (?-1859)—wife of the Decembrist Andrei Yentaltsev.

[10] Alexander Frolov (1795-1835)—a member of the Society of Associated Slavs—and the brothers Alexander (1803-1885) and Pyotr (1804-1864) Beliayev—members of the Northern Society—took part in the insurrection on 14 December 1825. All three were sentenced by the court to various terms of penal servitude.

[11] Natalya Fonvizina (1805-1869)—wife of the Decembrist Mikhail Fonvizin.

[12] Pyotr Svistunov (1803-1889)—a member of the Northern and Southern Societies, sentenced by the court to penal servitude for life.

[13] Ferdinand Wolf (1796-1854)—staff physician, member of the Southern Society, sentenced to penal servitude for life. He was well-known as a skilled and dedicated doctor.

[14] Here Maria Volkonskaya is describing the conspiracy in the Zerentui mine in the Nerchinsk mountain district in May 1828, which was planned by the Decembrist Ivan Sukhinov.

[15] Anna Rozen (1797-1883)—wife of the Decembrist Andrei Rozen.

[16] Maria Yushnevskaya (1790-1863)—wife of the Decembrist Alexei Yushnevsky.

[17] A reference to the revolution in July 1830 in France, and the overthrow of Charles X, the last of the Bourbons.

[18] Petrovsky Zavod (beyond Lake Baikal)—here, between 1830 and 1839, 68 Decembrists served their sentences.

[19] Camilla le Dantu (1808-1839)—wife of the Decembrist Vasilii Ivashov.

[20] "Godmother"—in an Orthodox wedding service, the role of parents of the bride and groom is taken by others, usually the godparents of the couple.

[21] The poet and Decembrist Alexander Odoyevsky, sent to serve as a private in the Caucasus. He was killed in a campaign against the mountain tribes in 1839.

[22] Alexander Poggio (1798-1873)—a retired colonel, son of Vittorio Poggio, an Italian who moved to Russia and entered state service in the middle of the 70's of the 18th century. Alexander Poggio was a member of both the Southern and Northern Societies and contributed a great deal to their unification.

[23] A reference to the uprising in Poland in 1830-1831, the July revolution of 1830 in France, the Russo-Persian (1826-1828) and Russo-Turkish (1828-1829) wars, and the cholera epidemic in Russia in 1830-1831.

[24] The uprising in Poland in 1830-1831.

The Letters of Mikhail Lunin to His Sister, Yekaterina Uvarova (1838-1839)

[1] The letters by Lunin printed here are taken from the publication *The Decembrist M. Lunin. Essays and Letters*, Petrograd, 1923, pp. 29-60 (in Russian).

[2] The Manifesto of 12 December 1826 established a Privy Committee to review the structure of state management.

[3] Themistocles (525-460 B.C.)—an Athenian military leader during the wars between ancient Greece and Persia.

[4] "I indicated that the slowness of success in the Caucasus flows from people of the old style". Here Lunin is referring to old and mediocre generals in charge of military operations against the mountain tribes.

[5] "I analysed the instructions of the Ministry of Public Education at the end of last year." Lunin is no doubt referring to the legislative measures and prescriptions which forbade the gymnasiums (high schools) to take in children from the lower classes, and also the introduction by the authorities of the principles of "orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality"—that is, that children be brought up in the spirit of loyalty to religion and the throne.

[6] "I said a few words about the Ministry of State Properties." A reference to the creation, in 1837, of a ministry to administer state-owned serfs. Between 1837 and 1841 a reform was carried through in state-owned villages with the aim of improving their management and increasing their contribution to the state revenue.

From the Reminiscences of Pauline Annenkova

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *The Reminiscences of Pauline Annenkova*, Krasnoyarsk, 1977, pp. 148-162, 177-180 (in Russian).

Nikolai Lorer about the Wives of the Decembrists. From His Reminiscences

[1] This account by Nikolai Lorer is taken from the publication *Notes of the Decembrist N. Lorer*, Irkutsk, 1984, pp. 136-142 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to Zakhar Chernyshev, a fieldmarshal under Catherine II.

[3] Kamenka—the Davydov estate in the Ukraine, centre of the Kamenka Board (branch) of the Southern Society, and a Decembrist meeting point.

[4] Alexei Yermolov (1777-1861)—a Russian general, chief-of-staff of the Russian army in the Napoleonic war of 1812, vice-gerent of the tsar in the Caucasus (1814-1827). He had connections with many Decembrists.

[5] According to Pauline Annenkova, her meeting and conversation with Nicholas I took place not in Novgorod but in Tsarskoye Selo.

[6] Dmitrii Lobanov-Rostovsky (1758-1838)—minister of justice, procurator-general of the Supreme Criminal Court which tried the Decembrists.

[7] John Field (1782-1837)—an Irish pianist, pedagogue and composer. He settled in Russia in 1802 and gave lessons in the homes of the nobility in Moscow and St Petersburg.

The Death of Alexandra Muravyova.
From the Reminiscences of Nikolai Lorer

[1] Lorer's account is taken from the publication *Notes of the Decembrist N. Lorer*, Irkutsk, 1984, pp. 156-157 (in Russian).
[2] "The baby"—the daughter of Alexandra Muravyova, Sophia (1829-1892).
[3] "Nikitina"—Sophia refused to recognise this surname. After the amnesty for her father, she was allowed to resume the surname Muravyova (at that time she was already married to Bibikov).

Reminiscences of Nikolai Basargin about His Companions in Exile

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the historico-revolutionary journal, *Katorga and Ssylka* (Penal Servitude and Exile), 1925, No. 5.
[2] Yalutorovsk—a small town in Western Siberia where many of the Decembrists settled in the 1830's and 1840's.
[3] A reference to Yevgenii Yakushkin (1826-1905)—a lawyer.
[4] Mikhail Küchelbecker (1798-1859)—a lieutenant in the navy, younger brother of Wilhelm Küchelbecker. He took part in the insurrection on 14 December 1825, and was sentenced to 10 years' penal servitude. Basargin is mistaken over the date of his death.

Nikolai Belogolovy. From "Reminiscences of a Siberian about the Decembrists"

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *The Decembrists in Siberia*, 2nd edition, Irkutsk, 1975, pp. 143-153, 163-164, 167-168 (in Russian).

Pyotr Pershin (Karaksarsky) about Mikhail and Nikolai Bestuzhev Exile in Siberia. From His Reminiscences

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *The Decembrists in Siberia*, 2nd edition, Irkutsk, 1975, pp. 213-218 (in Russian).
[2] A reference to the publication *The Decembrists. 86 Portraits*, St Petersburg, 1906 (in Russian).
[3] A reference to the defence of Sevastopol during the Crimean War of 1853-1856.

From the Reminiscences of Maria Frantseva

[1] The text of the reminiscences is taken from the publication *The Decembrists in Siberia*, 2nd edition, Irkutsk, 1975, pp. 295-303 (in Russian).

Nikolai Belogolovy on the Return of the Decembrists from Siberia. From "Reminiscences of a Siberian about the Decembrists"

[1] The text is taken from the publication *The Decembrists in Siberia*, 2nd edition, Irkutsk, 1975, pp. 140-153 (in Russian).

[2] While in exile, Alexander Poggio had invested all his liquid capital in a gold mine. The undertaking proved a failure and bankrupted Poggio.

Mikhail Lunin. "The Social Movement in Russia in the Present Reign"

[1] This abridged version of the essay by M. Lunin is taken from the publication *Memoirs of the Decembrists. The Northern Society*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 294-306 (in Russian).

Lev Tolstoy on the Return of the Decembrists

[1] This extract from a letter written by Lev Tolstoy on 24 February 1901 to Ivan Konkin, exiled to Siberia, is quoted from the *Collected Works of L. Tolstoy in 90 Volumes* (in Russian).

Alexander Herzen. "On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia"

[1] This extract from an article by A. Herzen is taken from his *Collected Works in 30 Volumes*, Vol. 7, Moscow, 1956, pp. 70-71, 78-83 (in Russian).

[2] A reference to the "Report of the Committee of Enquiry, 30 May 1826" to Nicholas I on the results of the investigation into the Decembrist conspiracy.

[3] Herzen is referring to the repression of the Decembrists which began following the defeat of the insurrection on 14 December 1825.

From the Article by V. I. Lenin "In Memory of Herzen"

[1] These extracts from the article "In Memory of Herzen" by Lenin are taken from the *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, pp. 25-31.

[2] Ernst Biron (1690-1772)—a favourite of Empress Anna (1730-1740), known for his cruelty.

[3] Manilov—a character in the poem *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol.

[4] Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889)—a well-known Russian revolutionary-democrat, writer, economist, publicist and philosopher. In 1864 he was arrested on a false charge and sentenced

to 7 years' penal servitude. His works were widely read by Russian revolutionary youth.

[5] Narodnaya Volya (The People's Will)—the most extreme revolutionary organisation in Russia in the 1870's and 1880's (the raznochinsky period in the liberation movement). Its most prominent members were Alexander Mikhailov, Andrei Zhelyabov, Sophia Perovskaya and Lenin's elder brother, Alexander Ulyanov.

[6] A reference to the 1905-1907 revolution as the "first clouds of the storm".

[7] At the time when Lenin was writing his article "In Memory of Herzen" (1912), a new revolutionary upsurge was beginning in Russia.

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ISBN 5-01-000497-6

Progress
Publishers
Moscow